

# PATIENCE

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**JUNE**

# 1.

What we say to each other is the same, every day, but the next day comes and we begin to see it. The day comes with us and we walk ahead of it, and it follows us. We are going a long ways with this day, until night comes.

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All of us were together at the base of the hill, looking up to the top of it. We were going to climb it all together, all as one. We took each step together, but it didn't work. We had to split up and each go our own way.

We all arrived at the top, but not at the same time, and when we got to the top, we looked at different things. Then we walked down the hill.

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I talked to someone the other night with a burden on my back. I wouldn't set it down because there was nowhere to set it down. I didn't look like a person with a burden on my back to the person I was talking to.

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Can I ask a simple question? When was the last time you saw someone other than yourself? It was probably a few moments ago, on the bus. The last time I saw someone

other than myself was while I was standing in line at the grocery store. A lot of times we don't see anything at all, but you and I have been seeing people everywhere.

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When I get up in the morning, I look out at the world and say, "Well, it looks like I've got another day in which to live."

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I was pinning my clothes to the clothesline all night long. And then the dawn started to come and then it arrived. I finished pinning and went for a walk all around the neighborhood, listening to the loud birds.

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I could be alone all night long and that would be fine, but then I tend to wake up in the middle of the morning and live my day. My day lasts as long as it does, until I get on the bus and go to work. At work, I handle transactions and I'm okay as long as nothing goes wrong and then I come home and take a shower and wear my non-work clothes. Then I go outside and walk around until it's dark and then I come inside and eat some food and try to go to sleep, and then I get up and write all night. I don't do this every night, but I try to do this whenever I have to.

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I'm talking on the phone to my best friend and the line keeps going strange so I don't hear what he has to say all the time. I think I'm going to have to hang up and try redialing. This happens sometimes.

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You and I were walking downtown under the sunshine, and a few tourists asked us for directions to the bazaar. We didn't know where it was, but we became curious and actually thought in the moment to ask the tourists if we could go with them, and maybe all five of us could find the bazaar together.

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It's not clear where or when the door opens on the day. Does it open before the dawn, or at the precise moment of sunrise? Or maybe the door opens on the day when there's some kind of opportunity. Opportunities arise when they do and you tend to leap out to grab them. But that's not patience, the waiting that's waiting to leap out and grab.

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I mopped the floor all by myself and I took a long time doing it because I didn't have a lot of energy. I wondered if people really cared about the floor, something I wouldn't have wondered if I had energy. I try to engage in the moment, but I've spent so long not engaging in the moment that it's hard.

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One time, I rode in a tank in a parade. I was crouched down inside and it wasn't the nicest experience. I could hear the bass drums and other drums and the woodwinds and brass.

Down inside the tank, there wasn't a lot of room to move or breathe. But then at the end of the parade, we all got out and that was nice.

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I'm considering growing my hair out longer. I know it's 2018 now and long hair isn't really in fashion, at least, not that I know of. I see some people with longer hair though, and I'm interested to see what would happen if I tried. I'm trying to do what comes naturally to me.

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There's a lot of technology which is encroaching on my lifestyle. I try to avoid it, but sooner or later, people in charge are going to take away my alternatives and I'll have to use it. What will I do? I'm not the one in power, they are.

I can just die, that should still be an option, although they might take that away. People who have power are strange, and they aren't content with other people doing things the way they want to. People think they know what's best for everyone. I know I've been the kind of person who thought that. I think it's fine to think that, if you're actually right.

But the odds of any of us actually being right are really low. So if we optimize for something that makes sense to us now, we're probably shooting ourselves in the foot. It's not smart to get what you want. We like to be pragmatists, and that's

fine, and I'm not sure if anyone really can escape pragmatism, the practice of going with what works. But we can at least get into meta-pragmatism, and ask if our concept of "what works", itself, works. I think that's a good way to go, and something people could think about more.

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We gathered under the oak tree for our lesson. The ranger was teaching us what we needed to know, talking about rattlesnakes and poison oak and about Native American grinding stones and about the creeks in the area. I'm not the best at paying attention, but I tried to tune in several times. I did pay attention to the part about rattlesnakes and poison oak.

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I walked several feet ahead of the group and listened to them talk. That's the way I do things. I want to walk and I don't have too much to say, so I end up in that position, as if by magic. Sometimes I walk with people who go at my pace and we talk to each other as we go. I'm okay with walking with people who don't talk, at least with some people. Some people are talkers, and it's not so comfortable for them not to talk. But then, if you're a talker, how else will you not be a talker if you are never sometimes quiet?

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When basketball players first start to learn to play basketball, they want to get right in and play games, and



their coaches let them, to some extent, but they have to do a lot of drills. And the drills help them to do better, to have better muscle memory. I wonder if NBA players do drills? I bet they do.

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There's a difference between humility and inadequacy. I'm plagued by a sense of inadequacy which I think might mask my pride. But then sometimes I think I'm special, and maybe that's me being humble, because when I think I'm special, it's when I'm trying my hardest to do what I can do. There are different kinds of special, and one kind is necessarily only to be deserved by those of great and lucky rank, but the other kind is just not ragging on yourself and giving your best.

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I go out into the garden and sit down under the red flowers that grow all around me. The flowers are too bright for me, so I go looking for shade, and find it under the pine trees that were planted a long time ago. I look around and find a pine cone, and then sit under the pine tree, tossing the pine cone up in the air and catching it. The breeze blows through the garden. I can't smell anything from the garden, but I can hear the breeze going through the needles of the pine tree.

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I don't drink soda very much. I used to. I also don't drink alcohol. I don't eat meat, and I try to avoid killing animals myself unless I have to.

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I'm not as old as I used to be. That's how I know I've grown up. I got about as old as I could, so then the only way to get older was to get younger. It was tricky how the math went.

Did you know that in 1811, the New Madrid earthquake sent the Mississippi River flowing backwards? It was only temporary, but it was impressive. We people can be like that. The magic is impressive, but temporary.

## 2.

Will we ever see the sky light up with the light of a host of angels? We look up at the sky but we don't expect to see anything like that. We're looking more for aliens, in this age.

The things from another world that we expect are no longer angels but rather, aliens. And we no longer think that other human beings can be wonderful and amazing or holy and true, but either they're aliens or they're normal.

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I never made a vow, but I kept what would have been a vow.

Then, later, I made vows, but it was a struggle to keep them. There is a certain amount of struggle in life. I think to myself that I should struggle less, but I know I need to struggle some in order to get by, so if I have to struggle some anyway, I might as well struggle some more to be more the person that I want to be.

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We got on the ride and rode it for 2 minutes. Then it was over and we got in the car and drove home. When we got home, we thought about things and dissolved into our respective bedrooms and slept the rest of the night, waking up in the morning. In the morning, we saw the light of a new day. There was nothing for us to do, while we did all the things we had to do.

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My impulse is to tell everyone everything. The story must be told accurately and fully. Other people aren't like that, though.

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The tavern doesn't open for another hour, and I sit outside it, hoping to see someone come by who is a regular. There's a tournament in a week, and I want to know if it's possible for me to attend. I want to see courageous people, even the manufactured courage of a tournament. Somewhere out there is reality, and if I can't see it right now, at least I can thrill my heart to its simulacrum.

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Maybe now is not the time to be wondering things. Maybe now is the time of day when I have to get into a routine, run through some paces. I should go somewhere after eating breakfast, and connect with a reality other than my own.

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I'm rather kind to people because I don't ask for too much. Sometimes people want a lot asked of them, in another way. They want to be a big deal to someone else, and I don't always feel like I can give that gift to them. It's very costly to me to really care about people. So I'm happier, usually, to not ask much of other people, to forget about people and let them be.

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Do we really need to respect limits? It seems that one kind of wisdom is the wisdom to respect limits. But if you respect false limits, then you need another wisdom, which feels like "anti-wisdom", to just "do the right thing and not make excuses". We tend to be stuck on one end of the switch or the other, the switch which flips from respecting limits to demanding that we do the right thing and not be so "respectful". And neither bias is inherently based in reality. And we go back and forth. Some people oppose other people based on their preferences of which way to go.

Maybe the best we can do is to cycle between the two points of view. But what would be better is if we could know the limits as they really are and never respect false limits and at the same time love kind of heedlessly.

But I don't know if the watchful awareness of real limits and heedless love are really things we can feel both at the same time.

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I got some people together to go search the valley for the children who ran away. We knew of the places they liked to hang out, back in the clearings down in the river valley, where the river flooded but didn't run this time of year. But they weren't there. We looked up and down the edges of the valley as well, where sometimes the children hid in little hollows in the gorgeside, which they called "caves", with

some justice. We called out to the children, saying their first and last names, but we didn't find the children. So we went home and told their parents that, and said we would go out the next day.

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If we respect limits, then we might leave the children to their own devices after a certain number of days of searching, because we have our own sheep, and our own farms to tend, and our own children to raise. If we are heedless, we will say, without thinking, "Don't worry, we're going to look for your children as long as it takes", and neglect our own family and concerns. To be loved in this way is very deep, to have someone commit to you no matter what, without a thought for their other concerns.

The first night when you go searching, anyone would do that, and there isn't too much of a tradeoff, because it's likely you will find the children, as likely as it will ever be.

But after that, it's more of a personal setting (a setting of our individual natures) which determines how long we search. No one will search forever. No one can live up to the heedless promise to look forever, but if you find the children soon enough, it will seem like you can and everyone is happy just because you found the children so soon.

But people appreciate the heedless promise, and don't hold it too much against the searchers if they make the promise and then after 10 days of fruitless search give up. People respond to the heart of the person who will give up everything to help, they feel that that person really loves

them, and that's part of what people really care about, in addition to getting their children back.

But the person who will not make the heedless promise perhaps in some factual sense is more likely to live up to what they do promise, is in that way more reliable. More reliable, yet, less trustworthy. Maybe the distinction is between what one writer<sup>1</sup> calls "reliance trusting" and "I-thou trusting". Reliance trusting is about entrusting specific cares in the hands of someone else, and because they're specific, it's important to know if the necessary competence is there. You don't want to claim to be competent when you're not. So you don't promise to rescue the children no matter what, because you may not be competent to do that, no matter what. But "I-thou trusting" is about trusting and being trustworthy, but not knowing what will come. So then it makes sense for its currency to be a kind of heedlessness.

To trust someone no matter what specifically comes has something to do with having a relationship which has a life of its own. It's hard to engage in that trust if you don't believe that, in the end, things will work out. And yet, people who officially believe that they do not have a reason to think that things will work out in the end still trust each other in the "I-thou" way.

Seeing how everyone really wants to be "I-thou" trusted, at least by someone, we might make it a rule to be heedless.

It's an appealing rule, but if it's too much of a rule, there is a lack of heedlessness. It's really, then, a strategy or agenda, rather than a heedlessness.

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I was breathing the air in the marketplace, smelling the woodsmoke from somewhere at the corner where they were barbecuing bits of meat on skewers, smelling the fresh fruit being cut up to be put in cups to be eaten. I saw the people unaware of their gracefulness, of the undeserved blessing that they lived in. All the people were so unaware, so conscious of what they were saying, but so unconscious of what it really meant.

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In the marketplace, what is undeserved about the moment of grace is not that people are so low as to not deserve favor, but rather that the favor does not follow from reality. Reality is unaware of the level on which the favor exists. People are so caught up in what they're doing and what they see in front of them, the way B follows A, and C follows B. This is the world they live in. They can't be aware of what is not part of their world. But they're covered by that, and so in that way it is grace. We are covered by the grace which we can't comprehend, and which is not even what we can think of even as we call it incomprehensible. We have to be unaware.

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I was young once, and I still am young. I'm not going to get any older than I am now, because I am already old.



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I don't have much to do except to talk to you. That's my limitation, that I can't see a moment outside this one. The heedless person is unaware of limits, but they are limited, exactly in their awareness. I know that there are people who are in great suffering right now, and I hope that what I say helps them.

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I feel like I don't live in the same reality as that which the news talks about. I wonder how much my thoughts can really have anything to do with reality. Is it reality that I'm out of touch with, or is it that the media are out of touch with reality? I think they see one aspect, and I see another. But people live in the media-world. So can I say anything for such people? Maybe all I can do is give people another world to live in. One could interpret that as a retreat from the world, but if enough people live in another world, that becomes the world.

I have to look at things as though I'm content to just have what I have for myself, for my own sake, not thinking about what effect I have on the world. I have to think that I'm doing my part, in my own way, which no one else can do. They can try their ways of causing the world to survive or even heal, and I will try mine, and between all of us, something will take.

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I don't have anything better to do right now. My mind can't do anything except what it's doing right now. I have no desire except to do what I'm doing right now. Everything narrows down to this moment. Maybe this a sign that I'm doing what I was meant to do. I don't know that for sure.

There are many more broken ways of interpreting things. If I'm desperate and broken, then I'm doing this to hold on and try to survive. And I am desperate and broken, or, I am not far from desperation and brokenness. But right now I am writing not out of desperation and brokenness, but because I choose to. But I couldn't choose anything else. It is only possible for me to do what I freely choose to do.

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We got some people together and walked over the hill and got to the other side. We were looking for our neighbor's animal, his donkey. We were looking for hoofprints on the path, hoping to get a clue where the donkey had gone.

Then, we found the donkey, a ways off the path. It was eating the grass off a ways from the path. We stayed with the donkey while one of us went back to the neighbor and told him we had found his animal. He came up over the hill and led his donkey back to his farm. The rest of us came back to our farms and went back to our work.

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A blue-eyed person sat next to me on the bus and looked at her phone. Then a black-haired person with straightened hair sat down and laughed at something she was thinking of. I wanted to talk to her, but I had nothing really to say. But

occasionally I see people like her, people who are kind of like me.

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Are people to be found anywhere? No, there are some places people don't go. That's okay, we don't have to demand of every place that it be where people go. We can go places that no one else wants to go.

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I learned how to ride a bike when I was in fifth grade. I have been a late bloomer in many ways. I liked riding my bike around the neighborhood. When I was in junior high school, I bought a bigger bike, but then later I learned how to drive, and I stopped riding my bike so much. It's dangerous to ride a bike, and you have to go up and down steep hills where I live. The hills are manageable, but I don't want to deal with traffic. I don't even like dealing with traffic while driving a car.

I could see a lot of people moving away from driving and traffic, and toward living in walkable neighborhoods designed-and-evolved to be workable for that lifestyle, taking mass transit for the times when that's necessary, riding bikes, moving away from excitement, fear, domination, rage, numbness, flow, and insensitivity (the ways of driving) and toward quiet, slowness, yielding, distraction, awareness, attentiveness, and sensitivity (the ways of walking). Someone<sup>2</sup> wrote "What Technology

Wants", but someone else could write "What Culture Wants". I think the reason why Millennials are killing so many things is just "what culture wants" in this era. When we look to technology as reality, we think it's going to get what it "wants" and that's going to be wiring us into the Matrix (eventually), with many intermediate conveniences (in the meantime). Why do we think we need convenience and technology to be happy? What we need is to connect to other people, and have something to do with all of our time. Technology is nice, but it makes us poorer when it threatens deep connection and being deep and real people. At a certain point, everything is subject to diminishing returns, and it doesn't add a lot to life to make it more technological.

One thing that has made my life better is to deliberately delay gratification. When I sense something that I'm craving, I try to find a non-formulaic way to delay getting that thing. If I feel an itch (sometimes literally), I try to not scratch it, at least for a while. If we don't ever say no to our impulses, we're the slaves of them. We have to work to survive, and work teaches us to not get what we want in the moment. But technology "wants" us to not have to work. So we have to internalize the discipline that used to be forced on us. It's not that bad.

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We want people to give us comfort and food, and this is sometimes a sign of love, but we don't necessarily want love, we just want a temporary relief, the relief of food. Sometimes love involves discipline. Sometimes discipline

isn't love, and we don't want love when we come back to it.  
But sometimes love is discipline. So if we love ourselves,  
sometimes we discipline ourselves.

Do we really want love? We don't always want love when we  
think we want love. We might want discipline, and we might  
want comfort and food, and yet still not want love.

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It's funny, I'm here at a cafe which I think is intended for  
relaxing and hanging out, and here I am working away. The  
person to my right appears to be emailing people, but she  
and her tablemate are chatting as they (I guess it's) work.

But here I am, working, in my own world, with my own  
music closing off the sounds outside me. I don't think  
there's anything I'd rather do at this moment. I feel a light  
but real pressure to work, not the pressure of being forced,  
but the pressure that water makes when it flows through  
pipes.

### 3.

We each have a shard of what is beautiful, and we advocate for our shards. It is beautiful to be heedless in trust, happiness, and joy, so we advocate for it, not understanding that it is also beautiful to accept and to live with dissonance, to sorrow and to be silent. Likewise it is beautiful to be quiet in that way and to advocate for that, not understanding that it is beautiful to be heedless, to trust and be happy and joyful. Or perhaps you can understand each side of the equation, but you can only love one or the other with all of your heart. Ah, but you love God more -- but what, or who, do you think God is? Our views of God tend to one or the other side of the division.

I think God is a father who has to deal with limitations.

Some children look on their father as omnipotent, and this allows them to be heedless. Some children see their father's limitations, and seek to help him.

But my brain is limited to what it can see. I don't understand what God does, because I am small. So in my limitation, I can perceive total health and wellness in a situation, rather than understanding the full weight of pain and sin. I only know a representation of the pain and sin of the world, except when something painful or sinful enters my life, and then it fills my gaze quite well.

I think the way we can help God might have to do something with the very fact that we are limited, and unable

to be beaten down by the truth of the awfulness of life. Our limitation enables us to act.

I don't know that God gets overwhelmed by sin and pain, and is thus in need of help from people who are not, but it would explain how it is that God can be so loving and so powerful and yet there is tragedy in the world. One explanation of this tragedy is that we just need to trust God, who really knows why there is tragedy. There is an answer, and it will someday be revealed to us. Or perhaps it won't, but why would we care, if we all make it to heaven?

Sometimes what this amounts to is that we ignore tragedy, don't really feel it as wrong, because it's more effective not to. We can remain heedless and expect everyone to do the right thing because there are no excuses. And this is a way we flush out false limitations (but we don't think there are any limitations, even if we do respect limitations in our actions).

One view of the Bible is that it contains a God we would not find loving if he appeared in modern times. One explanation for this is that in the old days, people invented a God who appeared according to their values, and now, somehow, we know that we have better values, and so we can tell that he is not a good god and was probably invented long ago. But another way to read the Bible is that, whether people made it up or not, the behavior of God described in it could have been that of a God who had to deal with limitation, who was forced to speak to people in a way they would understand, and that our culture has been gradually learning to desire truer love, and we really are closer now, but God wants us to

desire to be loving even more deeply, and desires us to love him. That's what I see when I read the Bible now.



## 4.

Not every day is a good day. We found ourselves trying to get through a day that was perfectly normal, but we were worn out on the inside for no reason. We couldn't complain about it, because everyone feels that way. We could complain about it, but all we would hear is people saying, "Yeah, that's how it is". No one experiences the freshness of affliction anymore, the wrongness of it.

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I got out of bed and didn't do anything for 20 minutes. Fortunately, I had time before I had to do anything. Sometimes we get up for no reason.

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We live in a mentality that nothing is special, no one is special, the world is random, no event is special, no event is meaningful, there is no hope, except in the sure and the mundane things. We batten down the hatches for a long 40 or 50 years of getting by. Do we have to think this way? Sometimes, but sometimes not.

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I got into a car accident the other day. I feel okay, nothing broke, except for the car. It's stressful, but I'm feeling okay about it, at least, right now.

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We gathered the remains of the car and had a funeral for it. It was our favorite car. We have been in the habit of personifying everything.

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My greatest desire is to get on the Internet. So I make myself wait before I get on there, but then sometimes that makes me desire it even more. That's not exactly what I want. Sometimes I can deflect the desire that builds up by trying a more creative way of waiting.

When I finally do get on the Internet, it never seems that great. The habit is more compelling than the reality.

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Would I be able to give up the Internet for Lent? I find the Internet too practical to not use... can I use it without being addicted? I can certainly afford to use it less, and more mindfully.

By using the Internet less, I have more energy to put into other things. I'm not sure about overall, but I'm sure that in certain ways, the world would be a better place if we denied ourselves the Internet, or whatever else is our most compelling habit.

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Even delaying the gratification of the urge to check the Internet is something. I think a practice of delaying gratification has value apart from pure renunciation. You're always going to desire gratification, but that gratification-reality will attach to different things. If you renounce a bad habit, habitualness may remain in you, attaching to something new.

Also important, maybe more important, is breaking formulaicness in yourself. An addiction is bad, in part, because it's a formula. Rigorously and mechanically clamping down on an addiction is also formulaic. Certainly it's fine to abstain entirely from some behaviors, but that doesn't have to be formulaic, doesn't have to get the mind in the formulaic mindset.

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Sometimes you have to live in a routine because, for instance, you have a job, or you have to pick the kids up from school at the same time each day. There's some kind of outside responsibility you can't escape. And that is as it has to be, and in a way, you may not be fully formulaic to yourself because of it, because you don't choose the formula.

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The sky has been high and topped off with small clouds these days, the sky so blue and tall. It's June, a month that can be overcast, or not. The days are their longest in June

and July. I had a hard time falling asleep last night and now I look out and see the sky with some haze to the west. The sky, the weather, the sun, the wind, is as it will be and I can only walk around in it.

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Thinking about addiction causes me to mourn, at least to feel the beginnings of it. I begin to see my brokenness in it.

I think a lot of people would be prone to misunderstand the desire to see brokenness that I have. I think a lot of people are destroyed by negative thinking, or they think they will be. Maybe some of them are right, and they will be. And then there's a brokenness, or a poignancy, in how they have to see themselves as whole and happy, which they can't necessarily comprehend. I don't destroy myself with self-pity, nor am tempted to wallow in it. For me, it is more dangerous to feel whole and invincible than to feel broken.

Satan works in me more surely when deep down I feel whole than when I'm broken. If you're broken, then your membrane can admit other people. Also, you can see the possibility that you could harm other people.

But it seems like no one wants this medicine, that most people want to feel good, and that that is how they are the best people they know how to be. It makes sense that people would be wired to feel good and to think of feeling good as a good thing, because our drives are connected to necessary things for survival. But then, it's adaptive for an individual to crush and smash and disregard weaker people, and maybe in a sense adaptive to the species, by "weeding

out the weak", and somehow our bodies feel like it's very adaptive to check the Internet all the time.

Probably we don't want to be ruled by evolution. What we really want is not what evolution selects for in us. Reality is not determined by evolution. There is another reality, the call of God. "But there's joy in God, right? I don't have to give up joy." say some people. But then, you are addicted to joy. Do you love God, or do you love joy? You'll never know until you are deprived of joy but still love God. I think you can have joy the way you can have the Internet if you're not addicted to it anymore. There's no need to not use the Internet if you're not addicted. But it's only when you're addicted to it that you feel like you need it. We get addicted to all of the fruit of the Spirit: to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, "goodness", gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. We get addicted to the Spirit, insofar as the Spirit is conceived of as bringing us such appealing things.

But perhaps two of those fruit-aspects are not so prone to addictiveness. One of them is "goodness", a word that is perhaps too hard to translate elegantly into one informative English word (and thus the puzzlingly vague "goodness" is used -- aren't all the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit good?).

One explanation I saw, and which might be partly what Paul intended, and which is useful for this discussion, is that the word *agathós* (translated "goodness") has something to do with "hard goodness" or "stern goodness". The ability to rebuke comes out of this, and the experience of being rebuked does. So this, by its nature, is not as pleasant to experience coming from others, and in many people is never an appealing thing to exercise on others (although it too

could be an area of addiction for some practitioners). And the other fruit-aspect that is not as prone to addiction is patience, because in a way, patience itself is non-addiction. The older meaning of "patience" seems to be not necessarily just being able to wait, but being able to bear affliction. Addiction is a hastiness to not bear affliction.

Christianity in our age has sometimes self-consciously tried to make itself a religion of being a child. Correcting for past abusive theologies, we now want to see ourselves as children of a loving God. Children want their parents to give them love, joy, peace, and be patient with them, and kind and gentle and faithful. Some children even want to be taught self-control, because they have a desire for mastery and freedom from shame. But children don't want their parents to teach them with "hard goodness", or to instill in them patience. Our parenting tends to be weak in these areas, and again, this is a corrective for tendencies which only messed up children in the past. But what we think a good relationship with God the father is, is not necessarily what a good relationship with God the father is, from his perspective. Children don't always understand their own best interests (otherwise we might let them loose to make their way in the world on their own), and there's no reason why we necessarily would. Would evolution select for us to necessarily have our best interests at heart? No, evolution only "cares" that we produce another generation of humans. Evolution has no problem causing us lives of misery, delusion, and fakeness, as long as we do that.

But what guide do we have, other than our own sense of what is in our best interests? We have to trust ourselves to

an extent in order to have any connection with any outside reality. God isn't found by rigorously avoiding what you honestly think is good. So then we have to default to knowing what we know is in our best interests and then have that revised over time as we grow up. We have to think that we're right, exactly when we're wrong.

--

There are times when an addiction makes it hard to do anything else. You can keep running away from the addiction, but it still wants you to come back to it, and doesn't let you get interested in anything else. I wouldn't have thought that my Internet use was a problem, but as I try not to engage in it, it seems that all along there was something messed-up about it. It had me in its clutches.

Yet, I feel like I may be able to skip my morning dose of Internet use (one of the two a day I have allowed myself since beginning this experiment of limiting my Internet use), if I can just hang in there and get past this nausea-wave of desire (but desire is even the wrong word, there's too much life in "desire" to describe this feeling-and-impulsion). I might go to a cafe -- if I can just find something to do there. The compulsion to go online is a grounding for the static of having time to dispose of, but I can use that energy to do something, if I can find something to do.

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This all might seem to be far too dramatic. "It's just the Internet, it's not like it's a big deal." I hope that as time

passes, it's no longer dramatic to me, because the drama comes out of the addiction. But when that day comes, I will have lost some of the opportunity to be truly patient, and I will only be self-controlled, or well-adjusted.

--

Is the goal to be patient, but not to go through the trials of patience? To enjoy its fruits but not experience it? I want to say that heaven is rest, and it certainly doesn't make sense to run headlong toward a heaven which is not something that we would even want to experience. I don't want to give up what is deepest and truest about reality by going to heaven. Nor to give up part of the nature I have that is like God in order to enjoy rest. I think that we approach rest the wrong way, unless we have been through particularly horrible things. We don't want rest when we say we want rest, unless we have been through something that takes our desire for restlessness out of us.

I hope that heaven is a place of as much depth and truth as the moments of most grievous patience. I wouldn't mind a heaven that had some unpleasant aspects, or which failed to be dramatically beautiful and enjoyable. A mundane heaven would be fine with me, as long as there was the depth and truth of "hell-on-earth" in it. The purpose of heaven, I think, is a place in which we can be holy for all eternity, and secondarily, there will be some enjoyment to it, and we won't really be interested in that enjoyment, our freedom will be to have no more addiction to enjoyment and consolation, no more interest in it, instead, just experiencing it because it's there.



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Addiction brings people together. That's how social media platforms work. The togetherness of people makes the platform compelling, and if the platform isn't addictive in its own right, it doesn't assemble enough people.

If people develop a love for connecting with each other, they'll seek each other out without addiction pulling them together. But the addictive platforms will out-compete the non-addictive ones for a long time, at least until the awareness that we are addicted and don't have to be takes root in people.

--

There are some things in my life that I'm not addicted to but which I like a lot and get a lot out of. There are a few albums, maybe four or five of them, which I can listen to over and over. You might think that I'm addicted to them, but when I don't listen to them, I don't feel any compulsion to listen to them. I have a very broken-down and comfortable relationship with them, no tension. The album I have stuck in my head right now is not one of them. It's one that I checked out from the library. It's not a bad album, but it's not for me, but it really "wants" me to listen to it.

--

Skinner boxes involve an unreliability of what is addictive. If we're not sure we'll get something, we wait expectantly,

really attending to the moment. And then we get it and we feel good. We don't take it for granted.

It is good to not take things for granted. But if there could be a way to be so reliably good that people aren't tempted to experience you as a Skinner box, and yet to not be taken for granted, that would seem to take some tension out of the world.

Maybe we need some drama at a certain point in life, maybe we need some addiction. Patience is learned through addiction and drama. But people turn against patience when they are overwhelmed by drama, and it helps when there is someone who is undramatic and good in their lives.

## 5.

I only used the Internet once today, and I'm going to see if I can fall asleep without using it again, but right now I feel the impulsion to it, and I suspect it will be hard to fall asleep without checking it again.

--

Affliction is of at least two types: the affliction of having to deal with the loss of something you have no power to get back (like when someone dies or a relationship ends, as far as you know, forever), and the affliction of having to not have the thing which you are capable of having, but which you deny yourself. For me, I think the latter is more difficult than the former. One could look at addictions as shadow versions of bonding (there's a TED Talk about this idea<sup>3</sup>), and so in the one case, the bond is broken and you can never get it back, but your body eventually adjusts, although you may remember or miss the person gone forever. You can simply passively endure the recurrence of the missing, as brutal as it is, and then return to your dream-life of mundanity. This is the simpler kind of patience.

To endure an affliction that, from your less-reflective self's point of view, you inflict on yourself (by denying yourself what you're addicted to, but which it thinks is pure goodness) is another kind of patience. It is in some sense active, and lends itself to struggle against oneself.

But this framing does not seem like it would be the best, or particularly effective. I don't really want to struggle against myself, because I'll probably always lose. So I would rather retrain the part of me that's so fixated on whatever reward it got from the Internet. By contrast, I don't want to be too effective in retraining my bond (half-broken by death or falling-out or break-up) with the people who have meant something to me.

Incidentally, I feel a desire to drink water right now, but it's such a simple insistence (an insistence like the short digestive tract of a carnivore rather than the long digestive tract of an herbivore) that I decide to try to let go of it for now, to let it go lightly and relax, and breathe a little and of course I'm typing this whole time as I think this. My theory is that addiction is a holistic thing, and that to be in a place of letting go in one area is to be letting go in all areas. The specific addictions matter to some extent, but also don't.

If I feel in myself a kind of lightness, a sense that I am a happy person, if I think about paintings from centuries past with their unrealistic but beautiful light, if I feel like being filled with love like a lightweight aspiring mystic (or an aspiring lightweight mystic), perhaps I become strange in some other way, my addictive nature channeled to some kind of eccentricity, but as I begin to try that thought, it seems to help, at least for now. It may be that I can't be a modern human if I want to escape the overall "mood-space" of addiction.

Hunger can lead people to kill and eat their own children, but people are willing to endure a lot of hunger before doing

that. Hunger is both something to be passively endured (when there is no food) and actively resisted. Hunger wants to devour people, true of less literal hungers as well. It's often possible to steal for one's meal, and this thought can be actively resisted, while at some point hunger grows so much that we seemingly have no choice but to steal, or at least it seems very understandable to do so. So as you resist stealing nonetheless, the affliction from without causes you to inflict affliction on yourself. Which is the easier to bear?

In this moment, I feel like it is my thirst that is my real addiction. I don't think about the Internet, I just want a drink of water. It will be interesting to see what happens after I drink the water, which I will do at some point after writing some more. Perhaps I can wait until that craving for water also goes away.

Resisting the desire to seek some kind of thing your less-reflective self thinks is good ("knows certainly", but it's not really knowing that it does, but the pre-rational self's more vehement, more certain, more mechanistic equivalent of knowing), and resisting its "yes. take." must feel to it to be something on the self-harm spectrum. I suppose the Internet keeps me in touch with the outside world, and in that sense it is in my rational self-interest to use it. For that reason, in part, I do desire to use it, and plan to continue to use it to some extent. But my pre-rational self doesn't really understand it that way. It just knows that it got some hits of dopamine from it, and that I use it in a soothingly formulaic way, that there is a little magic ritual of sites visited, there's a rhythm to it, punctuated with bursts of unexpected excitement, when pieces of information are discovered

which are nice, nice articles to read that teach me things. A mixture of soothing and excitement: what more could an experience-processing being want? I don't want exactly that, but part of me can't understand that yet, and thinks (or "thinks") I'm doing something like killing myself.

I can't think of much more to type, so I will try drinking some water. The night is not too warm, it is still June and not yet July when I expect the weather to be truly hot. I could wait still, and as I type, I feel some little itching feelings on my body, nothing too odd, just little reports from my body. And when I feel them, my thirst recedes a little bit. The Internet is far away, I'm hardly aware of it right now, and it might not even be licking the edges of consciousness, waiting to make its way back in like the strange spells of depression or turmoil I experience from time to time, which are present in their absence, around the edges, waiting to strike. I keep typing and the itches die down on one part of my body and arise somewhere else. My body wants me to pay attention to it; or, my nervous system generates things which I find uncomfortable, and I want comfort. I don't know if it would do me much good to say "I want comfort, now why do I want comfort?" in the hopes that by understanding the answer, it would release me from the phenomena. But it's an interesting question nonetheless.

I don't know if I really do want comfort. Isn't it a little bit uncomfortable to experience external reality? Just a little bit uncomfortable, not like having an itch or thirsting for water.

Nothing you would notice if you had specific instances of negative external reality to deal with, recently enough. Just something that would dawn on you more and more the more

successful you were in erasing the need to think about those negative external realities.

I used to find flies very annoying. For instance, I might be going on a hike, and the flies would move around my face and land on me while I was walking. I could feel their little legs crawling on me, and they got in my field of view and flew around my ears so that I could hear them sometimes. In the last few years, though, I came to the conclusion that animals can be loved just for being themselves. Dogs that bark at you are living their lives, the only life they have.

Flies are guests in your reality and can be thought of with affection. And while lifehacks usually fail, and I would not suppose that this would necessarily work for anyone else, I found that when I thought of flies with affection, I didn't feel annoyed when they flew around me.

Because lifehacks usually fail, I'm not sure some kind of transposition can be made to "my body is like a fly, or my thirsts and addictions are like flies, and can be thought of with affection, lessening their obtrusiveness and hauntingness to my mind." But there might be something there. There might be some kind of appropriate form of love for external reality so that I would never want to get rid of it, despite its necessary, low-but-inescapable discomfort.

This seems like an okay place to take a break, and go drink some water. My thirst is not too strong, although it's present, and it feels uncomplicated to me to do this, lightweight, in a way.

--

I drank a couple glasses of water and do not feel too thirsty now. Maybe I was dehydrated. Simone Weil says "The first characteristic which distinguishes needs from desires, fancies, or vices, and foods from gluttonous repasts or poisons is that needs are limited, in exactly the same way as are the foods corresponding to them. A miser never has enough gold, but the time comes when any man provided with an unlimited supply of bread finds he has enough.

Food brings satiety. The same applies to the soul's foods." (*The Need For Roots*, p. 12) I could go on about how this connects to how water is an okay thing for me to take in when I feel like it, though the Internet might not be (although it too has its satiety for me), but instead I will quote the next paragraph from her:

The second characteristic, closely connected with the first, is that needs are arranged in antithetical pairs and have to combine together to form a balance. Man requires food, but also an interval between his meals; he requires warmth and coolness, rest and exercise. Likewise in the case of the soul's needs.

I don't want my stream of thought to be overly relevant to myself. That is connected to addiction. I am not as interested in this idea of alternation between two different needs, between exercise and rest. But I could be, and I'll let myself be. If misers hoard gold, what is the activity they should engage in to counteract gold-hoarding? I suppose they would give away their wealth. Or it could be that gold-hoarding is not one of the soul's needs. Does civilization have any kind of rest from itself? Does it have any satiety?



It seems like a civilization of individual people who had found satiety would itself overall be more likely to find satiety. And conversely, a civilization that had to be voracious would tend to make it harder for individual people to find satiety.

We do have an alternation of pursuits or appetites. AI summers can be followed by AI winters<sup>4</sup>, and in the world of culture we are familiar with different fashions or trends. The human organism can feel like there is a healthy alternation around something like satiety, but the overall system (the civilization at large) progresses in a noisy but basically linear or exponential way toward ... a goal? Toward something. I would guess that the "miser" (the CEO with billions of dollars in stock would be more relevant to the 2010s than Weil's 1940s) got up every morning, went to work, and then came home at night, perhaps late, and rested, and enjoyed thoughts of his day (at the end of the many more or less good days), and relaxed and went to sleep and did it all over again, and took vacations, and met with interesting people, and pondered things -- a gloriously balanced and healthy life, even, although a hard-working one, complete with local satiety and local alternation. But the effect of his or her human life is a great hoarding of wealth indistinguishable (mathematically) from that of a miser, and a pushing of technology and culture further and further toward ... some kind of ... brink (an ecological cliff-edge; the approach of such sustainabilities as *1984* or *Brave New World*).

This little digression has quickly returned to topics that are relevant to my interests, but it at least began as a broadening of my inner world, a stretching of my inner landscape or relevance-set.

## 6.

The other day, I read the following from Thomas Hobbes<sup>5</sup>:

The whole sum of desires, aversions, hopes and fears continued until the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call deliberation.

Perhaps this is a form of writing. A book could be a record of deliberation, or the exercise of deliberation. Deliberation is a psychological system of interlocking parts, also a mood.

--

I'm not addicted to doing work on the computer (or, if I am, the addiction is lodged in the same part as any of my desires to work, in which case I need to quit writing for a time, as much as using the Internet). So I spent some time today working on the computer, using the Internet as I needed in order to get my work done. At the beginning of the day, I used it in its more social (clearly addictive) ways. But I feel like, having worked on the computer, I have less of a desire to go back to the social things. I have less of a craving to use the computer, overall. So perhaps part of my addiction is to the computer itself. Computer use soothes me and rewards me in some way. It is possible, as well, that my addiction is already breaking, a bit, and that's why I feel differently today.

What might seem to be of great significance when we don't know the outcome may then seem to be trivial in hindsight.

A good historian will remember that no one in the moment really knows what's coming next. There's what could be called "the historical fallacy of despair", which is that if someone reports that they went through a terrible trial and came through it, a person in despair won't count it against their own despair, saying "Well, it wasn't really as bad for them as it was for me, otherwise they wouldn't have been able to overcome it, like I won't overcome it." This may sometimes be true, but it isn't always.

When you're in a moment, you see the full drama of it, and face the true spiritual reality of it. When you're out of the moment, you live in a dream world of normality, and in that dream world, the real spiritual world is banished from your ability to be conscious of it. We might remember it, but it does us no good unless we commit to remembering it, just as someone in despair can sometimes only be helped by facts external to their enveloping psychic reality by committing to them by an act of the will.

--

But I may find myself struggling for quite a while with this Internet (or computer) addiction. I can't speak too soon.

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It is better to lose interest in something in order to be free of it. I mentioned before, I think, that the Internet isn't that great. I don't get that much out of it, besides the enactment

of the habit. So it's better to really see that truth, on a more back-of-the-head level, than to struggle with myself and discipline myself. Hobbes adds a complication, that my whole systemic being has an interlocking momentum to it, and often enough, that's what has to change. I don't know if I have to be part-machine, that is, maybe I can be freed from that paradigm by some kind of spiritual help. It's deeply spiritual that we live as machines, that itself is a spiritual reality, but the machine life resists that view and pushes us into the dream world of normality. In any case, for right now, here I am, part-machine, and I seem to have to interact with that reality to some extent on its own terms. It may be that depriving myself of something sends some kind of message to my systemic self. Certainly it proves to my rational self what it already suspected, that I can live just fine without using the Internet.

In a way, the message that I send to my systemic self is some kind of threat to its sense of easy fullness. I enter another world of constant hunger and drivenness. It would be more psychologically healthy for me, at least in the short term, to simply satisfy my desire for this thing that I have no real need to desire. This logic probably helps explain in part why we drift toward greater and greater convenience and technology. The people who make decisions, and many of those not in a position to make big societal decisions, don't want to be psychologically unhealthy, to strive, to make their lives complicated, to be ambitious.

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Sometimes I'm struck by visions of desire which are distinct from my imaginations of actually fulfilling the desire. My theory is that when I was younger, all my desiring faculties were strong and continuous with each other, so that when I began to desire something, it flowed nicely into my aptitude and enjoyment of it in reality. Now that I am older, the beginnings of desire are still there, but the aptitudes and enjoyments have faded, and the beginnings never adjusted to the reality. An example for me is music. I feel like making music, just a kind of pressure to do so. And to an extent, I still have a real aptitude and enjoyment of it. But I think about being in a band, and I can't say I'll never be in one again. And it's not that it's impractical to be in a band (although it certainly is, from finding the right people to finding a practice space and a regular practice time) but I can imagine my way past all that... and find myself playing or singing for a few songs and then needing to quit or even leave. This is not what the beginning wants me to do, but the beginning does not connect to most of reality.

Maybe this beginning of desire is parallel to the autobiographical self. I read in Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*<sup>6</sup> of an experiment where people were given colonoscopies, which are painful. They asked the patients how much pain they were feeling at intervals, and wrote it down. They found that the people who experienced more measured pain, but whose pain eased off smoothly at the end of the procedure, remembered the procedure as being less painful than the people whose measured, in-the-moment pain was less, but who experienced an abrupt and painful end to the procedure. People would rather choose

the procedure they remembered better than the one which was measurably less painful.

It's a weird thing to think about. I am inclined to say that remembered reality, or the remembered pain, or the remembered self's reality, is more really "you" than the objective self's, the in-the-moment's self. But that also seems weird.

In any case, the beginning of desire is something sort of like an "autobiographical memory self"'s forecast of how something will be, while some other self, somewhat more in touch with experiencing things in the moment, is able to forecast an experience closer to what it would or will actually be like. Perhaps rationalists could with some discipline remember what it was really like, work through the painful scene in their minds, and thus correct their distorted view of pain, assuming the in-the-moment self is who they really are.

But perhaps the beginning-of-desire self is who I really am, not the imagination of future experience self. That is, I should pursue all desires I begin to have regardless of how they actually make me feel, and in this way I will be challenged and pushed along toward being who I really ought to be. I'm not supposed to enjoy my life, I'm supposed to do what I find appealing and true.

Nevertheless, I don't find this beginning-of-desire self to be so trustworthy that I assume it always knows what's fiducially right or true. There's something like a "beginning of reason" which does not trust the proposition "Follow your

beginnings of desires all the time, regardless of how you honestly imagine you would have desire to do such a thing in the moment", and something like "imagining reason in its details" confirms this.

So my theory is that perhaps I should think through how often it is that using the Internet socially or habitually or to fill time or to relax or to hang out doesn't give me very much, and how what is really valuable about it has a real, finite value, not the half-unspeakable/half-inconceivable/half-infinite value that beginnings of desires or habits place on things, and that this value is such that I can have the thing just for what it is, in proportion to how it really helps me, and I can lay it aside to the extent that it does not. If I see a thing with the eyes of my spirit for what it really is, then I can exist in the same reality as it. It can be a real thing, as it really is, and I am not as alone. But my eyes get disconnected from a thing when I see it wrong, as though I think I'm addressing it but I'm really looking over its shoulder, not even at something that doesn't exist -- the unreality, the connection of my real consciousness with a nothing universe, somehow makes "atness" not obtain.

In the dream of normality I'm adjusting my drives so that I have a more psychologically healthy, more enjoyable or life-satisfaction-giving experience, but in the world of spiritual fact, I'm leaving the world of great and blank winds (or worse, if I have the misfortune) where I am certainly alone, and becoming able to live with more of my being in the same spiritual reality as other things and people. In the dream of normality, my world is vaster than the vast



encyclopedia gives it credit, but in fact, my world may or may not be one in which there's much of anything but me.

Having eyes for drama is intimidating, so it's understandable that people don't see things this way. But then, in a way, perhaps that's why we have evil, evil which makes our lives annoyingly not make sense, and perpetuates a world system in which the dream of normality is enough of a nightmare for anyone's tastes. Seeing significance exposes you both to the need to be courageous and the expectation that life will require you to be courageous. To an extent, that expectation allows you to live in the world of difficulty. Every significant evil registers in the world of spiritual fact.

Neither addiction nor the managing of addiction connects us to reality.

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This all reminds me of some writing I did last month on courage, and so I will use a computer to read over that, to see if it will be relevant to this work.

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## 7.

[Returning to the present...]

Today, I don't feel as strong a desire to use the Internet. I'm also not trying as hard not to use it. My old default was the habit, and my new default is less of the habit. I don't think you can be rid of an addiction by striving to be rid of it. That is, perhaps the striving is necessary, but you have to come to a place where you don't strive, in order to really be free of it.

I am not depriving myself or delaying my gratification as much in general. That is the deeper world of patience, but I am turning toward the shallower and more normal world of self-control, of internalized and thus relatively frictionless self-control.

People make themselves up out of approaches to the deeper world, which leave marks in their normal, habitual selves.

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My default thought right now is to eat some breakfast, but I consider that I should delay that gratification. So I read out of the Psalms, one of which being Psalm 132. There is some kind of hunger that I'm displacing away from my default hungers and toward the Bible, and in time, it may be that the Bible will become a default hunger, after which time I will have to displace my hunger away from it to some extent,

delay that gratification so that it does not become an addiction.

Psalm 132 is about how David wanted to build a house for God. Did David really need to do this? Wasn't God already with him? But he wanted to make a place in the middle of the visible, mundane country that was his. David's life was (at least to a large extent, not unlike most of us) lived in a visible world, the dream of normality. Perhaps he wanted something concrete to see and invest in, in the language of normality. How can we make a place for God in our lives? It seems like it takes effort, but it's not in the effort that God really enters. David's son, Solomon, actually built the temple, which had nothing essential to do with God, but which God did enter into. From a berkeleian perspective, God is always with us, in every eye-ful and ear-ful. God is quietly present. But our lives do not hear what is objectively true, and so we find ourselves laboring in order to care, in order to deliberately mark time and mark off regions of our lives. We need to impress ourselves in order to know what we do or ought to always know is true. Our "land", our "Israel", already has God in it, always already had God in it, but we need something impressive in order to find that true subjectively.

I think this could be connected to Jesus' death, taken as a sacrifice for sins for our forgiveness, rather than as example for us of how to live-and-die. Does God need Jesus' death to forgive us? Or was he always forgiving us? Notwithstanding that forgiveness is not enough to fit us for God's eternal presence (if our hearts forever remain in some way out of tune with his), we seem to have been concerned very, very

deeply with whether or not God forgave us, as though that were the obstacle to life. How could we be convinced in another way? While it's possible that we could be convinced in other ways, it seems that in practice, many, many people actually were convinced by hearing of Jesus' very visible, concrete death. Many people find that story very personally relevant, and it actually convinces them on a deeper and more visceral level of what they might only be able to hold shallowly and/or quietly otherwise.

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Then I read in Ezekiel 27 and 28, about Tyre. Tyre was beautiful and conscious of its beauty. Its beauty became its economic strength, or in a way its economic strength was also its beauty. The prophet (or God through him) spends a number of verses detailing this economic beauty (ch. 27, vss. 5 - 25). God is lamenting over Tyre in these chapters, and the beauty can be reason for the lament, both in that it led Tyre astray and that Tyre's loss is more poignant because of its beauty, that which made it beloved or loveable from the first.

The prophet/God sets Tyre in the Garden of Eden (28:13).

This is an odd way of looking at Tyre. Perhaps Tyre is meant to be looked at more as a spiritual reality than the literal country, or the country viewed through the eyes of the dream of normality. Tyre is a story that we all live (or if not all of us, then very many of us), and the Tyre in us will be destroyed forever, as it says in 27:36 and 28:19.

Tyre calls itself a god (28:2). We subjectively see ourselves as gods, and this is a case where our subjective reality is in a dream, but not the dream of normality. In our dream, the god must die, and we associate the death of this dream god with the death of the other God. The syllogism is that if one god is a false god, all gods are false gods, thus godness itself is false, thus no gods exist, thus there is no god or God. This syllogism might appear faulty from the lens of a logical accountant, by critical thinking's standards, but on a different, less explicitly-viewed level, it's very true. We can only distinguish between one phenomenal world and another, to choose between the logic obtaining in normality, the logic obtaining in our dream world, or whatever logic or sight we get from some other world, and over time we can sense out which is the world of fact.

Our Gods shape who we are. This is a point made in Psalm 135 (vss. 15 - 18)

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they can't speak. They have eyes, but they can't see. They have ears, but they can't hear, neither is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them.<sup>[7](#)</sup>

What happens when we make ourselves our own gods? It would seem by Psalm 135's logic that we are stuck being ourselves, at whatever level of perceptiveness, aliveness, and ability to express our hearts that we have. I've heard a saying that "awareness comes through pain", but I think that

awareness is better than pain. Yet, why would we choose awareness? We won't if we make ourselves our own gods.

We carry around static, reductionist images of God and of our own lives and of what is desirable, and these have to be broken down, broken open. They are whole, too whole.

Better to always remain broken down and broken open than to have to be shattered in bigger and more catastrophic ways.

## 8.

I was typing some notes on the side, but I'll include at least this one in this book:

And as Hobbes goes on to argue that the rational pursuit of self-preservation is what leads men to form commonwealths or states, the laws of nature give the conditions for the establishment of society and stable government.<sup>8</sup>

Hobbes' view of human nature is not necessarily complete. People are altruistic as well as egoistic, and theistic as well as human-oriented. (Humanism being altruism that is human-oriented (plus a small drop of egoism or "auto-altruism" as we include our individual selves among all humanity), while egoism is human-oriented as well, but theism is altruism toward God).

If states arise from enlightened self-interest, and the view that human psychology is inherently about enlightened self-interest, then to an extent they keep us in a kind of "weather" (to connect to Hobbes' "war is a time period or mood of inclination to violence whether it breaks out or not"<sup>9</sup>) of "human beings are self-interested and prone to war." To construct a state is to perpetuate war, just as to resist a temptation is to prolong it. And yet, it may be necessary to resist the temptation for a time to break its power.

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And a thought that is like a note:

Here are two different ways of looking at a behavior: I can pause my work in order to take a break because human beings are frail and need to recover, or I can pause my work in order to loosen my grip on my work, so that I am less addicted and formulaic. The second explanation connects more directly to the way in which I mess up other people than the first, and to the reality of evil. Pausing work for one reason does not accomplish the same exact thing as pausing it for the other reason, even if it's the case that the pauses begin at the same time and last just as long. The pragmatists talk about two things being the same if they explain the exact same behavior, and maybe they're right, that is, when there really can be a "same exact behavior", but in this case, relevant reality is different given different motivations for the same act (and likely enough other behaviors in the world that the pragmatists do look at as real are affected by which interpretation of a locally-identical behavior I take). I'm simply not as aware of how it makes a difference, if I'm only looking at the nearby behavior.

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Liberalism is a construct to pacify the Earth. It is looked on as shameful (or something like that), by some on the left and among Christians who in this agree with the left.

Liberalism assumes that human beings are self-interested (Hobbes was an early liberal thinker). Liberals say that human nature is such, in a relevant way.



So what the left is saying, when it wants to get rid of liberalism, is that either liberalism wasn't necessary or called-for in Hobbes' day, or that something has changed since Hobbes' day. Either human nature never was so bad as Hobbes supposed, or it's better now, or there's some other reason why we don't have to observe it now.

Can we produce more evidence, in the 21st century, of human nature's lack of need for liberalism, than we could have in the 16th or 17th century? We could try to do this strivingly-argumentatively, or we could do this relaxedly-constructively. In the first way, we would try to prove to each other that human nature has shown itself to be one thing or another through history. In the second way, we prove that human nature has changed by being a different kind of human. The truth is true, and we already know it, but has yet to be proven true. By taking people's attention away from striving with each other and arguing, by having a different kind of heart and producing external circumstances which are consistent with believing that human hearts are good, we make it so that people don't even think about the state of war, and so thereby we cause the state of war to cease. Liberalism itself has been part of this process, by creating external realities (such as more-or-less stably governed countries) in which it's more plausible on a gut level to believe that human nature is not all about suspicious egoism and exploitation, even though it does use the suspicious, egoistic, and exploitative aspects of human nature to achieve this a lot of the time.

Political realities are part-psychological (or, they are entirely psychological, but in their systemic aspect human psychologies put together don't always work much like individual psychologies). So part of how to solve political problems is not to fight them as though they are real, but to render them irrelevant, thus, unreal to people.

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A paradox: when we create external conditions that make it plausible to believe viscerally that human nature is not suspicious, egoistic, and exploitative, it tends to correlate with creating conditions where it is plausible to believe viscerally that there is no such thing as evil. So it is that billions of people live in considerable material poverty, attendant with much suffering, but the world does not at all seem that bad to us who have peace, psychological health, and prosperity. In our guts, we do not believe in other people's suffering, if our lives do not partake in that psychic reality. We might at best make some kind of unreal gesture (that is, a motion that doesn't make any sense to us viscerally), like destroying a sum of money (that is, donating it to a charity). Some people are given the gift of seeing the real world, in which there is evil (and according to the dream world of normality, these are among the psychologically unhealthy). But then, someday (maybe in the next 100 years), we will alleviate all material poverty, and then why would we think there was evil? During those same 100 years, we'll make progress on mental health, and eventually everyone over a certain age will have attained psychological health. And from that, will we know that there is no more evil? We will think we know, viscerally. And what more can

we want out of life than to viscerally know that there is no more evil? As long as we have no cause to be forced to know with our guts that there is evil, then evil as a concept, as a constituent of our inner landscapes and our reckonings, does not need to exist. The conceptual reality of evil, the very thought idea of evil, can be evil in itself -- for instance, in the Garden of Eden, or Hobbes' state of war.

But the question remains of reality. Will we know spiritual reality in that world "re-innocent" on a visceral, fiducial level? We don't attend to things as closely when they aren't a problem for us.

The knowledge of God is in some sense independent of the knowledge of the spiritual world. I take as evidence the many Christians who do not include in their sense of what relevantly exists any demon or Satanic figure or even angels, who don't officially believe in the non-existence of hell, or in the legendariness of the miracles in the Bible, but who live as though they do, but who do connect with God, include him in the circle of what is relevant to their personal, lived lives. So if I am to escape the dream-worldness of normality in a world in which evil (the eye-opener) is gone, I might do so by connecting to God, by seeing spiritual fact even though I don't have to, in a world where things are what they are rather than being some token of a wind of horror, nor simply don't exist, conversely: something I think I'm looking at but which I'm not (as though it were an "anti-token", or "anti-symbol", which seems to connect to what it is or to some easily looked-at deeper reality, but which actually signifies not at all what I'm connecting to as I move in its direction). As I find myself not-betrayed by my

perceptions of things according to seeking my ordinary, actually-small-minded goals, it's harder for me to see what is deep and true or even ultimate, or even to begin to see it, although that doesn't mean it's impossible.

Perhaps to seek God is appealing enough that we will eventually do so, understanding reality, but I think it will be harder, in a way, because we will have to do so freely, rather than being compelled to understand, as evil compels us.

We do have an appetite for understanding, which gets us to read a lot of books, for instance, or talk in a certain way to a lot of people, and maybe for some, this easily enough leads to seeing the spiritual world (although normality-dream knowledge can be pursued a long time without leaving the dream of normality). But it seems that we are broken out of that dream by evil, and it's not clear how long it would have taken us if not for evil's intrusion.

## 9.

For no reason that I caught hold of as it happened, I feel myself entering into a period of a pain in the throat and a kind of irritability which I experience from time to time.

This doesn't feel like the doings of demons. Perhaps some low-paid demon pushes a lever and hundreds of people around the world get the same blunt, mindless dose of this unpleasant feeling and pressure. But I don't suppose that demons are responsible for hot days or heat waves, and this feels to me more like those than like the voice of an evil being, or spiritual or mental slavery and manipulation.

So I write, which helps to get through these times. This is an example of the passive patience, as opposed to the patience of opposing oneself. These times are very familiar to me and on one level go very predictably and unthreateningly. As long as I don't have to act, I can just shut down whatever part of me would act out in a bad way because of them (snapping at someone seems most likely in this state) and wait it out and eventually I'll get better. I had to learn to do this during a bout of bipolar depression, my first, many years ago, but it wasn't the most difficult lesson for me to learn.

I find that with the pain in my throat, it's hard to talk with warmth. I'm not completely aware of this, but aware enough to know that I can't be as sociable or as reassuring or friendly as I otherwise would be. Some people are sensitive to such cues and there isn't a lot I can do in moods like this

to make them feel better, so sometimes I try to avoid people. I would rather people not care what I think about them or feel about them, not be so interested in what is inside me, allow me to be scenery and by myself when I'm with people. But people are wired to be social.

So right now I'm by myself, listening to some familiar music. I guess I could have chosen something glorious and full of light, and I may do so later. That would be a kind of drug to purge the pain, at least temporarily. But right now I'm listening to *Einfluss*<sup>[10](#)</sup>, which sounds like being awake very early in the morning, in the cold and dark and a day ahead of you, but like you've woken up early, not like you stayed up very late. So I am in a place which does not banish the darkness but rewrites it as something beautiful. Before, it wasn't exactly ugly, it was more brute fact. Now, it continues to be brute fact, but there is beauty here as well, and I can at least wrap the brute fact in beauty. The bitterness of coffee is always itself, but we take it with the beauty of the coffee's aroma.

This is a way to be patient, to find the moment trustworthy through beauty rather than comfort.

I can already feel the pain lifting as I attend to the beauty of the music, but there are two confounders to assuming that my little attentions have helped me, namely that I'm drinking water and typing, and typing activates my voice which connects to my throat where the pain is. But the pain is still here, but it is less.

Simone Weil used to get terrible headaches, and read a poem to get through them:

There was a young English Catholic there from whom I gained my first idea of the supernatural power of the sacraments because of the truly angelic radiance with which he seemed to be clothed after going to communion. Chance -- for I always prefer saying chance rather than Providence -- made of him a messenger to me. For he told me of the existence of those English poets of the seventeenth century who are named metaphysical. In reading them later on, I discovered the poem of which I read you what is unfortunately a very inadequate translation. It is called "Love". [by George Herbert] I learned it by heart.

Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ came down and took possession of me.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

I have occasionally tried praying the Lord's Prayer in the way that she describes further on<sup>[12](#)</sup>, with full attention to each word, when I was feeling one of these passive afflictions.

And there's something to it, in terms of getting through the time. I can't remember whether it always brings relief of pain, a relief that has little to do with any conscious sense that God is going to relieve me, rather from the connection

with God's grace through thought itself, rather than the pragmatic connection of expecting answered prayer. I'm not sure I'd even say that it's an aesthetic connection with God's grace, a very beautiful thought like this music I listen to is beautiful. Rather, it seems barer than that, only intellectual.

There are two ways to approach things (one of many dichotomies which can be laid on reality): through attentiveness, or flow. "Attentiveness" has many syllables and details: perfect. "Flow" has only one: also perfect. Both flow and attentiveness involve experience, but flow is connected and smooth and disengages part of the mind, while attentiveness sees the articulations of things and involves tiny (or large) breakings-in, jaggednesses and surprises, and is more conscious than flow. We want relief from attentiveness sometimes, so we give ourselves over to flow. Flow is an abdication. The music I'm listening to is a flow, as I guess all music is to an extent, although some attempts as best as it can to get as far from flow as it can.

We use flow a lot in our modern world. We use massive amounts of it when we binge-watch streaming video services, or listen to album after album while getting through the day. Progress seems to be an attempt to smooth things out, to eliminate the things that force us to be attentive. But in times past, people had less recourse to flow. It's different to pray the Lord's Prayer to yourself than to listen to an album. You have to say the words to yourself, out of your renewed effort, each word a new beginning.

I am attracted to attentiveness, to conscious choice. I don't want to give myself over as much to other minds or to



impersonal rhythms. So I can be aware in times like this that while music might be a nice balm, I should try to be attentive to it, if I do listen to it, and while I might like the flow of typing and thinking as I type (which, though I empower it myself has quite enough momentum to it to be like a flow of its own distinct from my self, if that makes sense), I might seek what are to me even more attentive pursuits sometimes.

In every moment of attentiveness, there is the conscious choice to attend. We are living in reality more when we are attentive.

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There's a kind of attentiveness called "savoring" or "enjoying". But better to seek truth and reality in what we experience, first, and let whatever pleasure we get happen to us on the side, something that must happen to us whether we like it or not. So then as I listen to my music, I can seek to hear just exactly where each note falls, with its exact accenting and timbre, not to feel good, and not to judge it a successful work of art, but just as I might look at a piece of sidewalk and see exactly where each fleck of mica is, or flip through the phone book and see how many "Smith"s or "Hernandez"s there are in a row. Looking at pavement or phone books can even be aestheticized, but it doesn't have to be, and for many people giving those as examples is good enough, and for others sets them on the right track, away from looking at paintings or reading novels.

*Einfluss* is bent toward this a little further than some other album I might listen to, such as *Loveless*<sup>13</sup>, because it's largely improvised, and the timing can be a little more particular than something lined up to a grid. The form of the music is a little bit "just as it is in the moment", not worked out to some kind of repetitive perfection. The musicians chose to capture-and-leave-in the sounds of them shifting in their seats and breathing, a particular sound to be listened to just when it happens, not as much according to musical logic and my expectations of what should follow (although in a sense it's exactly what I should expect to hear when people sit at keyboards and make music).

I hope that every word I write is true, but I don't always know that. I am truly happy when I seek the truth and engage with it, not when I enjoy things. Enjoyment is not to be endured (to experience it is the opposite of endurance), but on some other level, yes, it's to be endured. I seek the truth, and enjoy feelings and externally prosper because I have to.

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Perhaps the spiritual fact when spiritual warfare is past (the fact for those who are healthy), is silence. If you really listen to God, you're listening to silence, not that God doesn't exist, nor that God is impersonal, nor "apophatic", but that on some level, that's who he is. If you are attending to reality and there's no distorting personality invading you, that's what you see-or-hear.

## 10.

"Something has to be special in order to be significant" -- that sounds right.

Except that "special" can mean "worth a lot of people caring about", or "newsworthy" or "exceptional, rare". In which case, we would be saying that only people or events that are worth being famous are significant. Maybe that makes literal sense of "significant" in terms of "that which signifies". Something which is famous "signifies to many".

But the difference between an experience that is newsworthy and one that is not isn't much, a lot of the time, though one of the two might make national news.

But "significant" has come to have a different meaning, I think, referring to some quality which fame recognizes. In other words, an event can be significant without anyone hearing about it, though it might affect many people's lives.

There's a feeling we get about significant events, and that feeling may not even connect with many people's lives being affected. So the question is, is the feeling real? Of course it's real. The events that we think are significant are, if we honestly think they are. But we train ourselves to only see significance in things that our peers or society find significant.

So then experiences, lives, become less real and deep to us, we pass over the truth of them, as though to see them for

what they are and talk about them honestly is some kind of greedy or gauche claim to fame.

"You're not special" and "you're not significant" or at least the absence of "you're special" and "you're significant" have some virtue to them, but we tend to take their momentum into "your life experiences weren't real".

We have a bias against holding onto the past, which becomes a loss of history and thus a loss of who we are. And we become disconnected from truths, just because they didn't happen in our life phase, or just because they don't feel true or relevant to us at our current age.

It's difficult to remember, and we learn to not remember just like we learn self-control, to get rid of spiritual winds that get in the way of living our lives in the here-and-now. Failure to remember, and active and passive forgetting, are akin to casual impulse control. Memory can be a compulsion or a distraction -- that is, facts can be a compulsion or a distraction, or in some sense, the truth can. But memory can also be pursued through conscious choice, more as a form of attentiveness than of compulsion or flow.

Kierkegaard, in *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (ch. 2) talks about (as I would put it) the trustworthiness of remorse. I agree with Kierkegaard that remorse is trustworthy. It's a way to live in the same world as the one in which you might sin, a world that sometimes other people around us live in much more than we do. Remorse, at least of a certain kind, is a deeply quieting thing.

I think the remorse that Kierkegaard favored would flower in the vivid, obvious part of a person, would be a feeling that recurred naturally, and would work itself into every moment.

It would be similar to someone's spontaneous recollections of someone they loved who had died, or the continual grief in the year after their death, that either expressed itself on the main stage of their experience, or was waiting just off-stage at all other times. Some people feel sorrow like a kick in the gut.

I don't. For me, remorse is a choice. Perhaps that's how Kierkegaard was before the remorse that he wrote about flowered in him. Or perhaps it was a choice for him as well.

Or perhaps he had remorse handed to him on a plate and only from that thought about it over and over.

So I have to keep hold of my history. I'm very likely to lose my past, to lose whatever truths don't fit the mood and phase I'm in now. I read a book called *Zakhor* by Yosef Yerushalmi, about Jewish memory. For many years, the Jewish people didn't keep history (I think that was Yerushalmi's term) but they did keep memory. The Bible was their cultural memory, and the argument of the book was that only when they secularized did they turn to conventional history.

Actually (as I think Yerushalmi may have mentioned), the Israelites appear to have kept more conventional histories, the "books of the annals of the kings" mentioned in the Bible, but as far as I know, they lost those long ago.

Preserving the Bible (both in written form and in the minds of the people) was considered a very important task, which

has to some extent succeeded to this day. To copy the Bible by hand is a conscious effort, and many copies were made over the years. And the Hebrew Bible, to a large extent, is a book of remorse, as well as a book of remembering those times when God did act visibly, though nowadays we don't see him and are tempted to think he never did. There's a kind of hope which comes from retaining evidence, and hope could be seen as a moral virtue arising from epistemic virtue (Joseph Godfrey<sup>14</sup> thinks of hope as something like an openness to new evidence). There is also a grounding that comes from remembering your sins. In either case, we derive a reality from good memory which is not just remembering the facts and narratives, but also makes us better thinkers or knowers in the present. This could be a criterion for historiography aimed at the truth: to cause those who study a particular history to be the kind of people who see the truth as it arises in their lives in the present. But maybe this is what Yerushalmi might have called "memory" rather than "history".

The Hebrew Bible can be taken as a myth, but not just as the myth of a nation, but rather also the myth of an individual.

Each individual is the chosen nation, which has been exiled from where it really belonged by famine and the need for food, had to spend too many years in slavery, left slavery for a life in a way less comfortable, for a long time, then finally got into the land that was promised. And the near neighbors were constant temptations to sin, and the near neighbors sometimes were aspects of oneself, and one even stamped some of them out for a time, but usually they came back. And one crowned a king within oneself to make oneself a

real person like everyone else, and one attained a kind of wealth and fame and comfort, a standing-as-equals with the neighboring kingdoms. Each of us individually was this chosen nation which attained kingdomhood. And then our hearts turned empty and then bad and for hundreds of years we prospered, went after idols, and became wicked, although there was a remnant in us which was holy and true. And then God sent awful people who were doing his will to take us into captivity once again, and finally there we started to think back on everything, to develop the humility of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and to remember both our sins and the promises of God.

It isn't as though every individual lives out every aspect of this story, but it really seems as though the Hebrew Bible is a biography more than a history, and it is valuable to study biographies for how they can draw along the life of individuals. For generations, whether they all realized it or not, the Jewish people as individuals were telling themselves to "remember that guy", "Israel" being his name.

Borges might have imagined that in one of the cells of his Library of Babel there resided a copy of the book which had all of the truth, expressed as a biography. This is one way in which I can make sense of Jesus' statement as written in John, the famous "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life". I wondered when I was younger how a person could be the truth itself, and this is a clue.

Most likely, the Israelites didn't realize they were writing a myth of an individual while they were noticing the events of, orally preserving, and then writing down the Hebrew Bible,

in the same way that we don't realize we're writing down the myth of an individual as we live our lives and retell internally or record externally what we're experiencing. We don't realize this because the moments come fresh and we live in them like people in a conversation, magically able to understand things at one level but not so well at another.

(What I mean is, the relative ease of understanding what people mean when we're talking to them or listening to them in time compared with understanding transcripts; and the relative difficulty of understanding a life phase as it unfolds because we see it as someone who has to live it according to the logic which drives the life phase itself, whatever outworking of our attempt to make things better as we understand it at the time, rather than seeing the life phase as a whole, as a phase, as other than where we have to be now.) So, at best, we remember a thing which didn't exist at the time: the truth.

In a new phase, we hold onto the past in a way that is in keeping with the present. Fair enough. At best, it will be different than how we experienced things. But at worst, it will be different in a deceptive way. When we were young, we railed at older people for being so corrupt, but many of us eventually became old enough to see the appeal of those particular forms of corruption, not necessarily the wicked shadow-version-of-delight that we could feel in the corruption, but just the blank and logical necessity of them, the freedom of them. But with some kind of conscious attentiveness to the past, we can remember the younger judgment -- and why wouldn't that judgment be more in keeping with the truth? Why should we assume that age brings greater truth? Especially when the changes in age



involve some increase in debility. Maturity, as we often think of it, with all its stability, comes out of limitation, which can come out of weakness or fatigue.

As we think about the past, it makes sense to think of it in a way that honors the experience we had then without forcing us to remain in that past phase. We never know when we'll meet our past self again, and sometimes we are most bizarrely instinctually cutting-and-burning to past-self-like people when we encounter them. We think about our past as though it never happened to us, and so we treat our past-selves as though we always and forever were better and beyond them, when in reality we act that way out of an instinct of self-preservation against their life phase which we found unworkable, and which tempts us away from our newfound stability.

Have you heard of the Relationship Monster? The Relationship Monster is very solicitous for our well-being, especially insofar as it involves being in good relationships. The Relationship Monster finds a suitable person to relate to and talks them up real good. We enter into a relationship with them and ask the Monster from time to time if things are going good. "Oh yeah," it says, "that person has virtue X, Y, Z, just like we saw when we first started relating to them."

But then something happens. It could be anything. And then the Relationship Monster realizes that this relationship is no good. "Forget X, Y, and Z. Irrelevant. Never true in the first place. Let go. Move on. It's important to do what's good for you. In fact, they were a really bad person."

Worthless, actually. What you really want is Mr. or Ms. Newperson over here. *They* have some virtues. Let me tell you..." It just wants us to be happy.

The Relationship Monster is loyal, helpful, and shameless. It might never leave us, but with some conscious attentiveness to the past, we can understand both why it might have our best interests at heart (that is, we ought to leave the relationship or remain out of it), and yet it might be lying or suppressing true beliefs that we once bore in mind, effectively destroying knowledge.

Sometimes it is because of the other people in a relationship that we need to distort the truth. Ideally, we would all speak all the relevant facts and in a charitable and careful way reason from them to common beliefs and ways of seeing each other. But sometimes we realize that the other person in the relationship will only twist honesty on our part. So we can't speak the truth. We can't say, of the person who is both charming and lovely and helpful and subtly and deeply abusive that they are subtly and deeply abusive, but we appreciate their charm, loveliness and helpfulness (as much as that's the actual truth) because they will turn the admission of having good qualities into an admission that all of our calling-out of their abusiveness (remember, subtle) is us trying to be enemies but we can't manage to be enemies, no, they still retain the role of friends in our lives, and through that friend role their conscious or unconscious domination can continue. (In fact, it may not even be possible to tell them that they're deeply and subtly abusive, because that's a vulnerable thing you say to someone you want to still be your friend.)

To conclude this so that I can go to bed, although there may be more to say: There is a kind of memory that is only trouble, but then we want to forget, and enough forgetting is also trouble, but then we can forget that the forgetting was trouble and go on forgetting. So then for the truth's sake in the present, we can or should remember better.

# 11.

20 June 2018

It's been a few days or even a whole week. I had some other things to work on, which involved being on the computer a lot.

Was I compensating for not using the computer as much?

It's possible. But I felt different while using it, more efficient.

But I still feel two ways about it, now. Part of me wants to keep bashing out code and so on, but when I go to actually do anything, I feel tired. So I have to detach the desire to keep going, which is an instance of the "beginning of desire", because I can't actually get anything more done there at this time.

I can't remember all of what I wrote in this book so far. I don't know if I can continue in the same vein until I reread this book, and I don't know because I wouldn't know if I really did.

## 12.

23 June 2018

I finish reading Copleston's chapters on Hobbes. I can feel where my mind would have departed if it were more critical.

My mind is not as able to see the future and see problems (today, at least). But this is new for me, and I have to take it as likely being more common in my life to come than it has been in the past.

I find it difficult to make the movement of doubt that God exists, and when I make the movement, it is unsuccessful.

But at the same time, I am not in touch with, I can't easily bring to mind, my reasons for believing in God. I am in a risky place, where I might be wrong but I can't effectively question myself. I have thought before that such a state is likely to occur and to be a kind of equilibrium point that a person would settle into. Am I living the life I ought to, regardless of what I believe? (Or in terms that I've used, do I have a life continually filling me?) My non-epistemic life doesn't seem notably different than it did a month or six months ago. I'm living a life that I'm used to and which I guess I can say is overall good, and likewise I do feel more alive than I have at some points in my life, more real.

As best as I can remember, all of my previous questionings of the existence of God ended with me still believing in God, without having to perform any moves of intellectual dishonesty. So I guess I can trust this strange place I'm in,

provisionally. It's strange, but I am certain of God's existence not because I want to be, but because I have to be.

My critical mind shapes what I think of God's nature. The God I believe in now, automatically, has little content to him, little to think of him. All I have in my life is this very bare but large presence of God and my actions in carrying out what I take to be his will for my life. This isn't really what I want, and I doubt it's what God wants for me, in the end, but I can see how it might be useful to him. I might be in a place where I need to speak rather than see. But seeing is better in itself and less risky in how it interacts with other people. (I've been reading a book about "gurus"<sup>15</sup> which reminds me that people can be very persuasive speakers but not necessarily see correctly.)

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Godfrey, in *Trust of People, Words, and God*.

<sup>2</sup>Kevin Kelly

<sup>3</sup>Johann Hari, "Everything you know about addiction is wrong"

<sup>4</sup> (periods of increased development and hype of artificial intelligence can be followed by periods of decreased development and hype thereof)

<sup>5</sup>*Leviathan*, I, 6; quoted in Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Volume V*, "Hobbes (I)", paragraph 13

<sup>6</sup>see its chapters 35 through 38 for discussions relevant to this chapter

[7](#)World English Bible

[8](#) Copleston, "Hobbes (2)", section 2

[9](#) *Leviathan*, I, 13 (quoted in Copleston, "Hobbes (2)", section 1)

[10](#)by Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Arnold Kasar

[11](#)*Waiting for God*, p. 68

[12](#)p. 71 - 72

[13](#)by My Bloody Valentine

[14](#)in *A Philosophy of Human Hope*

[15](#)*Feet of Clay* by Anthony Storr

**JULY**



## 13.

I am here to read, as though it's the only thing worth doing, but I need to write something, in part because I feel the pressure to, and in part because I want to finish this book which you are reading, for the sake of the book. I open a lot of "tabs" in my mind, and I want to close this one.

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I use the idea, technique, motion of waiting patiently through suffering. I remember to tell myself that I am not above suffering, that it's okay for me to suffer. I use the Internet much as I did before last month, but it feels different. From a behaviorist perspective, there might be little difference, unless the behaviorist was looking particularly closely. But from a truly pragmatist perspective (that of William James, for instance), there is certainly a difference.

I might not be able to explain this difference in great detail, but it's there. There's a linguistic mechanism, a way that terms follow each other, which says that if you can't explain a difference in words, clearly, then you are most likely lying or believe something which is untrue yourself. But while that is a way of thinking that makes a certain amount of sense socially, I know from personal experience that it isn't always true, and so I trust myself, even if I can't persuade anyone else, and I am inclined to trust other people who can't explain what they believe in a fully-articulated way.

The truth, and what should be believed, in some senses don't line up, in a social environment that isn't trustworthy enough.

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I've been trying to work on understanding certain philosophical topics recently, and I think that I will work on them a lot in this book. But I wonder if there's something else to write about? I don't remember last month too clearly, so I suppose what I write now will hold itself up next to that, and the two of them will comment on each other.

I have a hard time extending an intention forward in time. If I do manage to keep my word as to who I am, it's not because I made myself be who I was, but because I was who I was. That's how I naturally or authentically turned out to become, or how I was made.

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I don't feel as comfortable writing in the fictitious way, using vignettes<sup>[16](#)</sup>. That part of me is closing up, to some extent. So I need to deal with the pressure to write in some other way. I don't know what way that is, though.

I am hungry right now, at a cafe that is noisy, to some extent, but not too noisy to concentrate on writing. I don't know how to talk about what is inside me in literal terms. I can write quickly, but I keep writing in terms of addressing

what I see, and not saying what I am. If I see myself, from the standpoint of an observer, I say certain things about myself. But in the vignette writing, and sometimes in poetry, I have been able to simply say things. That way of expressing things correlated with a raw and always speaking inner-inner voice (the inner part of the inner voice), which seemed to outlive itself. But the consequence of a stance of (relative) silence is that I can't speak the way I used to, I can't just say what I say, I now say what I see.

The difference, in part, has to do with whether I am offering myself, or if I am attending to what is outside myself, even if what is outside myself is myself as an object. I can't offer myself the way I used to, at least as far as I know. But the benefit I get is being able to see things closer to how they are.

Or do I see things as they are? Perhaps I am just as wrong in this perspective as when I offered myself. The self-offering self saw things as wild and charged, and this was not always in tune with reality. But then the part of me which can be more articulate, ordinary-seeing, moderate, seems to be missing the deeper spiritual reality. In the first, I was saying things without understanding them, and misperceiving as I went along, but there was a spiritual world, even if forces within it deceived me. Now I am further from those, which makes me more and less accurate about reality.

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There are other ways to deal with inner pressures than using words. I could play a computer game, or work on coding a

program. This might not directly address the inner pressure, in terms of working out its issues, but sometimes the feelings go away without a trace, for a time, if you simply do something else for a time.

As a matter of fact, I am writing now, I am using words to pass the time, but the words are not connecting quite like the words when I just say what comes out of me.

What will happen to me if I don't address these inner realities? Some would agree with "the goddess grows stronger when no one pays attention to her" (C. S. Lewis and someone<sup>17</sup> Lewis was quoting who was the source of the approximate, remembered quote; and Jung and Freud, I think). Am I storing up a power in me? I look on that with what I call "fear and trembling", a sense of wonder, bewilderment, and a horror with a different tone than ordinary horror, I suppose a dry horror, stripped of evil. I don't think that power is always evil, but there is always an element of horror to it. Certainly its consequences can be good, but it's an awful thing in itself.

But my life is not necessarily my own to live, and I think that God will work something out of the specific changes in my life, if I continue to consent to it, and my own heart is pure enough not to contaminate what happens. What happens is power, what is power is a horror, and if I contribute some evil of my own, then the horror of the power becomes as full, charged, and fleshy as any horror.

I don't think of myself as an evil person, and while "that's what an evil person would say", I do think it's possible to have a sense that you're not evil and be right. But it's also possible to be wrong about that. A sense of settled certainty about who you are is a dangerous thing.

If my heart is not that of God, it is more likely through laziness rather than malice. My problems sometimes take the form of me having thoughts occur to me which I very rarely act on, which if I did would harm people. Rather than acting on them, I shut myself down to those people, and this is what causes harm. This all isn't something I deeply believe in and delight in, but I don't always focus on trying to overcome it. If I overcame it, I would cause less harm.

Sometimes, I don't try to overcome these tendencies (however it is that I would do that) because I'm busy working on something else, or I'm floored with much more powerful (horrible) experiences. In the latter case, I simply can't choose what to attend to, and in the former it very well may be that my efforts are better spent, in those particular moments, in work. I have intentionally and unintentionally ordered my life to be less sociable, so as not to negatively affect other people by my focus on intellectual and artistic work. But I think I'm more or less as solitary as I'm going to be, and I still find myself sometimes running up against those inabilities to connect with people, and it may only be a matter of time before those harm other people, betray them in some way.

It's a bit of a question whether to prioritize this in a given moment, something that can be hard to answer. But in

whatever case that I am lazy, then the question is easy to answer. I ought to work on something.

I don't experience myself as lazy. Sometimes I feel myself held down by some kind of *acedia* or torpor. Perhaps in some ways, these are lazy, but they quite likely are not. But I suppose there can be a directed laziness, a laziness toward doing a specific thing, rather than a laziness toward doing things in general. If it were simply impossible to do intellectual or artistic work, or even to work any kind of ordinary job, if in some future time there is no more work to be done except for human beings to relate to each other, would I then be lazy toward overcoming my issues? Framed that way, it's harder for me to judge myself as not being lazy.

I have a reluctance toward applying effort there, which might be a form of laziness. I can imagine myself struggling on the inside over whether I should take some step of overcoming my out-of-tuneness with relating to people.

Perhaps there would be some kind of class I could take, or some person I should spend time with, and it would be very difficult to bring myself to take the step of committing to that experience. I would work very hard to avoid working on it! Or I might not, but I can well imagine myself being like that.

Is this laziness? It has similar outcomes, maybe the same in many cases. I can still be an overall caring person and be reluctant in this way. I think a really lazy person is overall not a caring person, or their reluctance is an expression of their not-caring.

However, even if I overall care, the reluctance is a lack of will and delight in the direction ... of what? ... likely of relating to other people. Aren't people, particular ones, all of them, inherently the kinds of beings that in their nature bring forth a responsiveness and a will-orientation in people who perceive reality? I don't wish ill to people, but I would be happy to be away from them, to keep to myself when around them. While my natural self, the vivid, obvious flesh of me, the "physiological" part of me; as well as my pragmatic situation; require me to relate to people, my deeper heart would like to be alone, only with whatever there is when no one else is around.

But how would it sound to someone else to be told "I need you for now, but deep down I'd rather not be around you or anyone else"? It must sound terrible, yet, I would understand if I heard it from someone else. Yet, I need to keep in consideration how other people feel, right?

Definitely, I don't want to cause harm. But I would rather never have to ask the questions "How does my interest in solitude affect other people? How does my lack of interest in other people affect other people?" This is solved elegantly by me being alone; but I can't be alone.

To become human-oriented would cost me something, in the stream of my life on earth which can't extend too much beyond my 70s or 80s. This makes it relatively easy for me to think about this question. I'll just do what I'm good at, that is, what I connect with more fluently, try to optimize my life so that that works, and to the extent that I see people around me whom I hurt, devote some attention to changing

how I treat them. None of this requires that I change my basic orientation to reality such that I would delight in and attach to people in the way that would most-elegantly, -cleanly, and furthest-from-lazily solve my issue of not relating to people, which sometimes harms or betrays them.

But to have the heart of God...

God is (at least relatively) infinite, and I am finite. I can't take on every role. But my heart is not essentially something which has to do with the roles I take, but rather is an organ of valuing. So if God were squeezed down into my life, what would his heart give up? Perhaps the ability to see itself relate to other people, the dissonance of truly valuing people against what is a deeper calling to aloneness for me.

Perhaps God himself wants to be alone, but he has to attend to all of us, has to be involved in all of our lives, hear our prayers. He has to work, and would like it if someday all of us could cease to call for his attention. The seventh day of history is the rest of God as well as man. I think God has more of an orientation toward people than I do, but I don't suppose he has less of an orientation toward solitude.

But perhaps my desire for aloneness is not an aversion to people as much as a draw toward whatever is left when people are gone, which is the natural world, and more essentially to God. If God is a distinct reality, not a social construction, than to get away from all other people must be valuable sometimes. I don't desire all the extra, all the richness of people. I want what is quiet, and I'm more easily



filled than other people. I find myself to be theistic as well as humanistic, but the theism in me, while quieter, seems like a longer-lasting thing than my humanism.

God would want my heart to value connecting with people.

So to the extent that I can't, there's a tragedy of the stream of life. Because life is putting itself together, if we take a narrow enough time slice (possibly lasting many years), if we had no sense of security trusting<sup>18</sup>, we would have to see tragedy. Part of being honest is seeing what you see before you, even if in some sense you know things are promised to be better. (Consider Jesus' "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In the moment, it's an abject cry of being abandoned and betrayed. But it's a quote of Psalm 22, which ends with triumph. Jesus was in the moment, fully there, but even the most dire and life-monopolizing moment in reality connects to other moments.)

So then I should see all the friendships I'll never have, and the people I've hurt and can never make amends to, and just see that that's unfortunate. At least I could see that.

So that may be my root sin-and-opportunity-to-repent, the thing which realistically could be different, only not-done because I'm unwilling, not unable.

Yet I have found that the tragic view of things does not come naturally to me. Perhaps I must see as tragic (or in some way deliberately mourn) that I can't see things as tragic.

Constantly applying deliberate mourning takes me away from my other work. Best of all would be a mood which is

always consistent with the tragedy that I can't relate to people, stuck in my life, stuck being myself even if that's who I'm made to be.

Is this mood something I can just decide to have? Maybe to an extent it is, but it seems elusive.

There might be some kind of root, perhaps no longer a moral root, but rather some experience or perspective which I should uncover or devote some time searching for, which is in a way not deeper to my person than the question, "do I value people such that I desire to mourn them?" but which is the root of my inability to naturally mourn. It's a little hard to separate the equipment from the intention when we talk about the heart. In any case, I can say that the heart can desire its own better function, and that that desire must act when it can if it's genuine.

Talk about sin is difficult because we hardly ever experience ourselves sin. We go through our lives sinlessly (rather, sinning, hurting, misvaluing) and then we realize some aspect of that, and for a brief duration we're in the process of changing who we are, and perhaps we are done with that aspect, smoothly, productively, sailing as sinless ships. (But we are still sinning.) So then any moral question is not about talking, recognizing, thinking. Or perhaps it is about recognizing, but the recognition just is to change. Therefore this discussion is incomplete unless I change, but I will keep my changes to myself, rather than revealing them in talk here. Partially, this is because they are mine and set-apart and delicate. Also, I tend to forget everything I write when I am done writing, and while there is value in what I've

written so far even if it does not connect to what happens in my life (as simply a picture to help other people think), I don't want to depict in it a change that doesn't go deeper in my life. Depicting myself as musing is fine, because I have mused, but depicting myself as changing is a different matter.

## 14.

Some time has passed, although not too much. I came home from the cafe and transferred the contents of my word processor onto the computer. The word processor I use, an AlphaSmart 3000, takes some time to transfer files. So I ate some food and wrote a note to myself while I waited, and also checked Twitter.

I was thinking about what to do next with my night. I'll be up a while longer. I don't feel like I can really read anything directly to do with philosophy, even though that's something I'm working on understanding both for a specific book project and a long term interest, and I have a lot of books lined up to read. I feel a kind of attraction toward Angband, the old roguelike which I can either play (as playtesting or just for fun) or work on (I have a very small variant of it, or something like that, which I can add to).

There's a side of me that I didn't feel for a long time, which has returned bringing interests in Angband, fantasy literature, allegory, old computers, old computer music, computer games in general. I don't understand as clearly how this has value for me, because I don't see as much how it would "change the world". Philosophy seems the more deep and powerful pursuit. I think that fantasy is more valuable in itself than power (which has to have an object), and typing out "fantasy" and "power" makes them into two siblings, and siblings bear consideration over time, in a reflective way. But I don't see as clearly how fantasy helps the people who are suffering most. I'm not saying "I don't

see as clearly" in order to communicate "it doesn't help them", rather I'm saying that I don't understand it, and because it seems that fantasy is with me no matter what, I will keep looking to try to understand how it helps those who suffer most.

While keeping away from fantasy, checking Twitter, I found myself drifting into a very small slump, not a feeling of depression, but rather a kind of blanking of intention. I was reading from the syrupy well of tweets about different world realities. Andrés Manuel López Obrador was elected president of Mexico. I didn't know much at all about him, and it is good for me to have learned what I did. But in avoiding one "lesser use of time" that I at least really would like, I got into a use of time (syrupy wells) that seemingly favors no deeper reality, no sibling of which it is the expression.

What I'm writing right now, I clearly see the value of. I can't write too much about deciding whether to do things, because there's a lot more to life than deciding whether to do things, but I can do this to some extent, and I'm okay with it. I write about the spiritual situations I am in, sensing danger and deeper significance and making motions in my life.

And this connects to fantasy because of the literature of allegory. Fantasy (which can include more than just the fantasy genre of literature) connects a concrete depicted world to ... something ... going on inside the person. Some kind of structure inside each of us can seemingly only be accessed when we aren't looking at it. Or perhaps there are

wider spiritual forces or realities, encapsulable in figures like Spencer's Errour, or as the images I've seen of Perfection and Power, of Man and Woman. I'm not decided yet whether these things can be said to have full ontological reality, but they certainly have reality in the fantasy-theater of our minds... and perhaps in a way that we can't look at directly, fantasy is entirely as real as the deliverances of the most realistic philosophy and science.

I don't want to get too far ahead of myself here. I want to be able to think through thoughts like these carefully before speaking too much. Yet, at least they can serve as indication to me that it is permissible to develop the interests and work-pursuits I have related to fantasy, for the time being.

Why should I be so careful with how I use my time? I don't want to succeed at the wrong thing, to get led astray from what it is I'm really supposed to do by things which appeal to me but which only appeal to me. (Certainly it's possible that after a certain amount of time playing Angband, I'll have gotten past whatever it's supposed to teach me.) I see more room for this in fantasy than in philosophy, simply because fantasy is easier to get into, in some sense easier to appetitively trust. Philosophy (of the sort that I want to read, at least), repels me, so I only seek it as much as I mean to. But the more easily consumed things ask very easily for my further attention. I think about what I'm doing by making more works of fantasy (programs or books that I might write) and it concerns me that all I might be doing is getting people into the fantasy world, without drawing their attention to the people who suffer most. I do think fantasy

art forms have potential to be vehicles of messages of engagement, if not of the world directly, then at least of the spiritual realities which keep people from engaging with the world. But fantasy in itself says "be in yourself". In a way it is art of adventure, in that it talks about adventure, but it is a comfort to consume it. Prudence and mission are more in tune, for me, with philosophy and action in the world.

Fantasy has to get away from its default state in order not to be literature in comfort about adventure. I don't wish to take comforts from people who need them, but I am wary of comfort because of its inherent appeal and most justifiably wary of the spirit which puts comfort above the well-being of other people.

In general, art is in some sense consumed in comfort, reaching out toward prudence, mission, adventure, or some other way of life, or perhaps just existing in itself, in comfort.

Reality can easily be identified with power. If you want to dismay someone, you had better dismay a conscious person and not a person you imagine, or a simulacrum of a conscious person. So the Inner Party members in *1984* need reality, real faces to stomp on forever. So then reality has something to do with the world in which people are actually affected by what we do. And as far as we can tell, fantasy is not such a world. So then, fantasy can be a relief from power. We can engage in fantasy as though it is real, and yet have no power. If we declare fantasy to be real, then we are saying that it is not power that accomplishes things, but non-power, powerlessness. And in this we can defy the spiritual force of Power.

This does have ramifications politically. If everyone believed in fantasy-as-reality, it would affect how we lived, because Power itself would be cast down, relative to where it is now, and people would behave differently, and so then fantasy (as an idea) would have had power (although it would have had no power apart from being an idea). In a way, fantasy is a way of empowering human beings apart from Power. That is, at its best it can be that.

There is a nice argument for Christianity here -- certainly for Christianity if not for the existence of God. I think that an atheistic Christianity imagines God and then loves God, though that God is imagined, and then attributes the creation of the world to that God, and in so doing casts down Power. And though worship is not necessarily love, as a means of not worshiping Power, one can worship God. I could recommend this God to any atheist, and I think some already worship a God not unlike this, or a prototypical version of it, like Scott Alexander's Elua mentioned in "Meditations on Moloch".

Whether the God worshiped by Christianity is real, that is, can really suffer, is not something Christianity (the thought system) can really answer. It doesn't know of such things. Only persons know persons, meeting face to face, producing a connection which can't be directly shared with others.

Can fantasy connect a person with God? That is, with the really suffering God? I think that there is a world very much like fantasy which does, the world of spiritual danger. In this world there is threat and fear, the calling forth of the way of



life of prudence. We leave comfort, not for adventure, which insulates us from the reality of suffering, but into prudence, the world of terror, anxiety, and pain, and their aversion. In this we can be connected to the great (in magnitude) reality of suffering, only through which we can really be connected with God and other people. If in our comfort, we are drawn into prudence by art, or something else, then through that we can connect to God. This is the way of the first Christian monks, and perhaps some others like them.

I was going to say that we only connect to God and other people if we connect with the reality of suffering, as long as anyone suffers, but I think we must always connect with the reality of suffering in order to connect with personal beings because personal beings always have a capacity to suffer, and all of them have suffered. The category of reality of suffering will always exist even if no one feels suffering.

Relatedly, connecting with the reality of suffering does not mean that you suffer, but rather that you are truly aware that suffering is the kind of thing that happens. Losing that awareness prevents us from connecting with the suffering which really does exist, of which we have ample evidence.

Some suffering is not so bad. Some suffering prevents more suffering later. Being anti-suffering as a formula is not trustworthy, and betrayal is worse than non-betraying suffering; yet betrayal is not always untrustworthy if it leads to less betrayal later. But there is plenty of useless betrayal in the world, and suffering which amounts to that kind of betrayal, the disintegration of experience, maddening and blanking. And we have all experienced this unredeemed and essentially irredeemable evil, a drop of it, or an ocean.

The adventure aspect of fantasy has some value. It can teach courage, by encouraging people to take on risks (which then force them into prudence). Adventure is all jokes and disconnection from reality -- even in real life it's a fantasy. But because it's so foolish, it brings us into terrifying situations in which we must draw on some non-adventure way of life, prudence or mission or some other. The important thing is to face death and be willing to go on, and to value something more highly than your own life and your own comfort. Be it as it may, adventure is a way to that, and is valuable as it fills that service.

By undergoing the motions of courage, of facing death and going on, we are enabled to really live. So if the whole world that brings that about is a fantasy in some sense, it produces something real spiritually. If fantasy art pushes us further in that direction without too much disconnecting us from those who suffer too much, then it's worth something, if for no other reason than that. I am glad that I have spent this time writing this all rather than directly experiencing and furthering fantasy art, but though I think it will always be secondary to other things I do (for instance because I don't work on it as fluently as I do on other things), if I do not let it get away from me, I can see its place.

## 15.

"...if I do not let it get away from me, I can see its place."

Who am I to control my life? What kind of life is it which I can control? There's a life I can control, and one which I can't.

Control as a way of life and spiritual reality is not far from Power as a way of life and spiritual reality. We think we're the ones who are powerful when we wield power, but we are furthering power and we are committed to power and to the way of life in which power is exerted by us, and thus, as things ripple out from our thinking, as "everyone acts just as I do" (a way of thinking which both makes a lot of sense and doesn't make sense at all -- but which does have at least some effect), the way that power rules the world, or, I could capitalize it as "Power".

Do I want to live in a world in which Control rules? Control has its good sides, and on the other hand I have a certain taste for chaos, but I don't think these are sufficient either way to decide me. I don't want a world which is controlled by any principle other than what is actually good for each and all (I first wanted to say "other than perfection" but Perfection, at least, is something to be wary of), -- because total Control is a kind of stasis of values. Control enshrines whatever values I had whenever I happened to optimize myself. Would I want my self of 5 years ago to have been declared "Perfection for all practical purposes"? Would I

want my self 5 years from now to be declared such by me? I don't want to always get my way, even if necessarily in some sense I always do. The words "my way" carry the charge that I want resisted. If I lost that chargedness, I might be ready to see my will in the world. But by then it wouldn't just be my will, it would be something that wasn't a will, or which was the will of each person and that wasn't much of a will for them either.

Yet I don't want my taste for chaos to rule. Chaos, like fantasy, is something that can take over if I let it. I'm not likely to let it, but if I could let it rule, I don't think I would want to. Why should I get what I want with respect to chaos, lapping it up if that's what I desire? (And to an extent, it is what I desire.)

I want something other than my desires, in either case. I want the reality of another personal being. For me, this takes the form of a way of life of working, which in my case is a way in which I relate to God. And that brings me back to the concern. How do I live my life? I don't want to control my whole life. I also don't want to let a temptation be a problem for me, and keep me from doing what I most need to do. I can't control my life.

What has historically ended this dilemma is the large parts of my life in which I have had no real choice about what to do because I was either responding to eminently compelling ideas or images (with all the horror of the power of their beauty or horror) or something from outside me was compellingly irritating, breaking, or oppressing me. This freed me from this petty choosing, which is not called

"petty" because it's beneath me, but because my mind gets small as I worry about such things.

Looking at what those external things have taught me, and how to a large extent they have shaped what I think, which is my work, which is how I relate to God in large part, I see them as his communication to me, a large part of his collaboration in what I write. If my goal is reality, that is, connecting with a being who suffers, that could be the test for how I think about how I think about such things as fantasy and chaos.

I don't feel like I should dive into fantasy right now, perhaps not tonight at all. Neither do I feel like it's good of me to make the decision not to. These feelings are not feelings of avoiding work, but of the untrustworthiness of their objects. I don't feel like working on philosophy, in terms of a lack of appetite, and all I'm doing right now is working on this. I feel no problem writing this, but I don't want to talk too much more about my own process of writing and my process of deciding how to go about my process of writing. You can kill just about anything by turning it in on itself.

So I guess I'll take a break and see if anything comes to me to do.

## 16.

I had some food, and thought a little bit.

Taking a break and eating are basic items of advice. The advice is nice because it says "we're all just human beings, and we have to take care of ourselves". This advice is partially trustworthy, but can keep us from being more than "just human beings" (that is, keeps us from the aspects of being human beings which are deeper, stronger, truer and thus more frightening and dangerous and sometimes more necessary than the self-consciously lowly human self).

Certainly if you are the kind of person who is automatically keyed into things outside yourself, you may find the advice to do your best to help others and to give of yourself to be untrustworthy if you fully give yourself to it, if you fully trust it, because whatever happens to pull on you will make you do whatever it is it says you're supposed to do, itself not really thinking about "goodness" overall, just a need pulling on you for its own mindlessly selfish reasons. These needs, as independent entities, are easily seen through the eyes of fantasy, but might seem to be their own message of "someone is dying" through the eyes of power or reality, because the frame of mind in which you notice your experiences and put them together into things or persons is more in tune with fantasy than with literal reality. But "someone is dying", that simplistic formula in your mind, is not necessarily in tune with the reality of you actually helping a real person, nor with the reality of all the other persons who suffer and all the ways people suffer of which

you're not aware, and is an automatic compulsion. So you fight the compulsion with your own defense, a trusting in self-care and limited horizons. (There's wisdom for the atheistic Christian in loving God with everything and only loving your neighbor according to the standard you ask for yourself. God is the one who is in touch with reality and cares for everyone fully, and it is through your love of him that you love everyone.)

Having thought, I remembered an idea that I had that is plausibly not fantasy, and which gets my mind off the avoidance of fantasy.

As a city-dweller, I think about cars and traffic. One idea that I've imagined is a congestion tax. I'm not really qualified to come up with policies, and I won't share all the thoughts I've had on this tax, not expecting it to actually be implemented, but I can say that it would involve marking off "zones of congestion" (areas that were supposed to be decongested, selected by the will of the people in that area). People would be taxed based on the number of miles (or kilometers) they drive in a year modified by the proximity of their residence to the nearest zone (warning: this could be an opening for fraud; do you really live where you say you do? -- is there a solution for this?). The tax would fund bonuses paid out to people, and the bonuses would be lesser the further the citizen's distance from the nearest zone of congestion, dwindling to nothing for both tax and bonus sufficiently far away. In this way, people in rural areas would neither be taxed for what they don't contribute to, nor disrupted by receiving bonuses which might go down as tax revenue went down as people in the cities cut their driving,

the rural people having not much if any ability to cut down their driving. With this tax in place, people would have a penalty for driving above a certain amount and even a reward for relocating such that they don't have to drive as much. The reward and penalty would work together to make themselves unnecessary, after a certain point, and people would enjoy the benefits of living relatively close to where they do their usual things, with less of a commute. (What would this do to neighborhoods?) Perhaps households could sell one or more of their cars and walk to work. (What would this do to the auto industry?) (Overall, what would this do to businesses or self-employed people who rely a lot on driving to make a living? Ideally they could cut down on driving, but could they cut down enough to stay in business? Probably best to keep taxes and bonuses low at first and gradually increase over time.)

I would like to live in a world in which an ideal decongestion-promoting measure such as a tax-and-bonus worked. To that end, I share the idea, although I have to assume it's been thought of by someone more knowledgeable already. But also, I share it in order to discuss the fantasy in it.

Any scheme to make the world better is describing something that does not exist -- yet. That "yet" is an odd word. It's almost getting me to think that the future does exist now, and yet it doesn't. The future both exists and doesn't, through it. The congestion tax-and-bonus exists in my mind just as clearly and distinctly as a personified need does, or as Power does. Which is to say, perhaps not as "clearly and distinctly" as an indubitable axiom, with some degree of vagueness and lack of awareness, but still a



thought with boundaries and something which can be seen, however far off it may be.

Lack of awareness is something which plagues me more as I get older -- to some extent because I become more aware of my lacks of awareness when they occur, and also because they are more frequent. It is said that if your computer program has bugs, you didn't really think it through, and that suggests, in a way, that a policy which exists as a "sort of clear and distinct" idea in my mind isn't really as clear and distinct after all, if it contains the policy equivalent of bugs. This thought both makes sense and doesn't. It would seem to imply that ideas, even if unimplemented, require something in their development for their own sake in order to be ideas as ideas, according to their own unique individual idea-natures, an idea I would like to believe in but which I don't trust enough to assent to. (Maybe after enough reflection I will come to see how this could be true.)

However, through the lens of fantasy, it makes perfect sense, and practically speaking, that may be good enough.

If ideas are real, treat them like real people, as is done in allegories, and accord them full respect, thinking of them as beings that can be injured, loving them and building them up, and if they are your children, teaching them to abide by the ways of love as deeply and trustworthily conceived as you can. Then, if these ideas are ever realized, they will at least be beneficial in reality according to their own logic, and have coherence, and are more likely to be workable in their implementation. As things that resemble computer programs, they will still only fail due to your oversight, and you will most likely need the computer to indicate that you

have bugs, but in the world of policy, there are all kinds of mysterious forces that are expressed even in people in their more-or-less averaged out masses, which can render your idea not as good in effect as you intended.

Ideas can also betray you, can fall to pieces or even can be malicious -- another angle to the fantasy point of view.

Fantasy sees the conceptual as the personal, which can help some minds deal with concepts and with the personal consequences of concepts. A personified concept keeps the mind in the world of persons.

So fantasy sees the conceptual as the personal, just as it sees the future as the present. Does fantasy lie?

What is the truth? There are different definitions, and I've tried to think of my own, and I've thought of multiple ones, but one of them is, "the whole truth". There's such a thing as deceptive truths, facts which are 100% true but which, if you think about them, cause or incline you to believe something untrue somewhere else. We could have 1,000 deceptive truths in our belief-set, and be deceived about 500 others, and this wouldn't be an ideal or even the best practical belief-set, most likely. Likewise, we could have 1,000 deceptive truths in our beliefset and only have one or a few false beliefs, but it could be just as problematic, because in this case, we falsely believe about the whole of reality, summed up in those few false beliefs.

The overarching whole truth, speaking of the whole of reality, gives a context to each of the deceptive truths, which, to be fair to them, are simple humble facts apart from

our minds' inclination to be misled by them. In the right context, the facts do not mislead.

How could we possibly know the whole truth? Ideally, some being which knew all the facts would come up with it. This may sound just too theistic to some, but I really think it would be the best way to go, if we were designing reality ideally. I'm not sure that I can even recommend the thought to an atheistic Christian, because what we want is a deliverance from that knower to us, some kind of revelation, and an atheistic Christian expects nothing from the God of ultimate non-Power.

If you see that someone is blonde, and you have a prejudice against blonde people, you might have better been blind, and have known the blonde person merely as a person, their bloneness becoming a deceptive truth. Under that whole truth, it's better to love people even if you are incapable of knowing that some people are blonde. Perhaps you see someone who is intellectually inferior to you. Better that you can see that fact and not react to it the wrong way, with the murderous crushing excitement or the dismissive chest-out sneer of the killer and the humiliater, but perhaps better for some to simply not see the full meaning of "inferior" in other people, though in some sense that denies the truth. Interpreting "inferior" the wrong way is worse than not really being aware of it in the first place.

Therefore, it is conceivable that some definition of the whole truth is such that it's more important to see things the way something pragmatic (according to some value set) would have you see them. Or something spiritual -- you see the

thing that is not as though it is to help you to do what's useful, but who's to say that in another world, that thing that you believe usefully doesn't already exist? Certainly if it turns out that your scheme to better the world did come to pass, then it did already exist when you first thought of it, at least, it already existed in the future. But the future is a nice place already, in which many things can be said to already exist, certainly we can say that if we look through the eyes of fantasy, but who's to say it doesn't already exist? We don't have evidence that it does, but then, it wouldn't be the future anymore if we had perfect evidence of it, because then it would be present, and if we have partial evidence, that might just be what we experience when we see a plan beginning to form in our minds, with all its unwarenesses/bugs.

In a way, it's as though there are multiple futures which are fully formed and which begin to be evident in our present-becoming-past, and as we navigate, we avoid some and incline ourselves toward others, to a greater or lesser extent.

So when we are making plans and then carry them out, we are doing something like blurring fantasy and reality. Time does something like blurring fantasy and reality, by bringing us the future into the present. Does this prove the existence of God, as the atheistic Christian drifts toward their own imaginations? I'm not sure. I think a materialist could say that time doesn't bring the future into the present, that rather the present evolves into its future form over time, according to physical laws. The atheistic Christian could see through the lens of fantasy and of materialist reality both at

once, through the former seeing the blurring of fantasy and reality, through the latter seeing fantasy as nothing but fantasy and reality as the unfolding of physical processes.

Real fantasy is never seen as nothing but fantasy, there's always some kind of reality to it. And humans can blur real fantasy with dismissed fantasy, and fantasy-mixed-with-reality with distinct-describable-in-principle-unmysterious-limited-finite-reality. This blurring is powerful and perhaps in some way trustworthy (part of me wants to argue for it) but I can only ask, "Does it connect us with any being that suffers, God or human?" If the answer is yes, then it connects us with reality. That connection can't fully come in the world of fantasy, I think, although I haven't thought this all the way through and may come to change my mind, depending on whether I can see how fantasy might be real in some way not given above. From what's given, we have to somehow leave fantasy and yet bring it with us if we want our plans enacted, and whatever God we postulate has to appear to us, likely enough exert power on us, in order for us to believe he's real enough to have power, if that's what we're interested in, and somehow has to act to convince us of his love, if we are to know that he is suffering.

## 17.

I have had a lot of words in me, but a difficulty reading. I suppose I am full of words, so I'm writing right now, being as I am in the middle of writing this book.

Where do words come from? Do they come from spirits? Am I a conduit for something beyond me? Do I speak my heart? Do I observe reality? The answer is yes.

It may be that we can only be conduits, with minor traces of our free selves. Consider that the body appears to be mostly a complex and semi-perfect system of mechanisms. The brain merely obeys the laws of physics, most of the time. It might have bits of quantum noise modifying it, and it might have our consciousnesses speaking through our free wills, but the body very much obeys laws from outside of it, and so it is with our spirits, it would seem, which are clothed in this world in bodies that behave in accordance with law. In the spiritual world, to look through the lens of human experience, we find ourselves very often the conduits of ... something. We don't always know what. We might be the conduits of narcissistic personality disorder, or of greed, or of schizophrenia, or of adherence to the rules, or of low blood sugar. We might be the conduits of some cunning spirit which twists our systems into a pattern useful to it or tormenting to us, or we might be shaped by some spirit into being the instrument of the great cause of deception in the war against truth. Or we might be the conduits of a spirit

which speaks the truth and which thus renders us truth-speakers. Everything furthers something.

--

The clouds come in from the east, up the side of the mountains, big anvils.

Why am I writing this? What am I channeling? Am I a channeler? What makes me spiritual, or intuitive? Why can't I be reasonable and philosophical? Reason is safe, but I have words inside me. Can I trust myself to speak the truth? What spirit am I channeling?

The curious people saw me lifting myself up off the ground, and I stood tall, after I put myself together.

What is this image I'm trying to convey? What is its deeper meaning? These images come to me so fluently. But what am I doing?

If we all gather together, we can be brought into one place that is spacious, a tent as big as a pavilion, all of us together, "all as one".

"All together, all as one" is a line from a song<sup>[19](#)</sup>. I know where that came from. But that's immaterial.

Whatever line I spout from someone else was selected by me, just as whatever word I say, I am only borrowing from the many generations of English speakers. Maybe I am saying something big, or I'm saying nothing. Am I

saying what I desire, or was the desire put into me which says both this and which thinks of people coming together? What do I really want? I want comfort and quiet and solitude, wilderness and storm and solitude, people and cities and solitude. Do I want everyone all together, all as one? No, I am much smaller than that. Or am I? I always want to quote Trygve Gulbrandsen<sup>20</sup>:

“You lie, Adelaide!”

The words rang out so clearly that she started up. They had come from her own mouth; her honesty had uttered them.

I don't understand myself -- and so, can I trust myself? Somehow Gulbrandsen knew that Adelaide's honesty was her honesty, and I suppose Adelaide knew that -- a person can at least know their own honesty. But how frightening, to think that I could be anyone, someone out of my sight. I don't understand myself and the power of me.

We talk a little bit and when we're done we put everything up to bed, the tea cups and the washed saucers, and then we go lie in our cupboards, with the mice in the walls. We get up in the morning and put waffles on the skillet and cook eggs very well-done, and eat eggs and waffles and then we clean the kitchen. And when people see us at the window, they think that we belong together, but we don't really belong together, we just are together all the time because our lives happen to work out that way.



Am I writing this about someone I know? I can suspect such a thing, but is it the truth? If I am not in control of the process, then why should I think I surely know what it's about? Wouldn't anything that spoke through my life speak in the language of the "words" stored up in me? I don't understand my own power and I step away from it while looking at it. But there was some craft in that section, I will inform you, some moments in which I made linguistic decisions. There was some art in operation, but only in little ways. I did not change the spirit of what was coming out of me -- and my editings themselves, who is to say that those were not affected by the spirit which flowed? If I am in the place of the spirit, then I will apply my craft in the way that fits its cave or its grove or its desert flat.

So if anyone can gather where we used to, and put together a loud procession in order to parade left and right and center, and then we can have speeches: speeches all night long...

And I feel the energy dissipating, the pressure, just a bit, and can finish with a joke I had saved up during the day...

...solemn ceremonies reading from the Book of Hobbes and the Book of Locke and the Book of Jefferson, for today is the day of great celebration, Liberalism Day, July Fourth of America.

After all, today is July 4th, or before midnight it was.

Ah, how safe I am in this joke, and yet the joke hurts. I am dying to make this joke. I try not to make jokes as much as I used to because they are empty and lead to death. I don't mean to worry you if you like jokes; perhaps you are made of more meat than I am. Yet, I honestly believe that jokes lead to death, and I wish that I weren't so funny and I'm trying to get over that.

The humor comes from the unfilteredness and the cleverness and the oddness of what I say, and also the meanness on occasion, when I strike a blow by making an observation. You may not understand a single word I am saying, but I know the reality from the inside of these words I say which are jokes. You thought humor was innocent, but its cousin is horror -- both into strange juxtapositions, and closing the heart to feeling, and disconnecting people from reality, humor through blanking, horror through hypnosis. No, the world is not as safe as you thought, and I am part of what makes it unsafe, despite what I wish. But everyone wants humor. It makes them laugh.

I can't say everything there is to say, so I have to say goodbye. Very well, perhaps I will see you again. Perhaps I will not.

And I intentionally draw this to a close. I intend the overall message, but the execution is not fully intended. What am I really saying? What am I implying? What am I inviting into your life? I hardly read my own writing. Though I look it over and over to proofread it and edit and evaluate it as an artist, I

hardly let it speak to me. I doubt I understand half of what it's saying below the surface -- things which it is genuinely saying, not things which we impute to it, project on it. So what am I inviting into your life? I don't know, and this frightens me. And yet this is how I can write. It certainly takes me out of the picture to a large extent, and my quiet-loving, comfort-loving, discomfort-loving ego, no grand adventurer, small-minded, and sinful, does not get in the way as much of this which speaks the words, I think, of... someone.

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With the foregoing, I suppose I am signaling a close to a past way of writing, by exposing its workings. I hope I haven't ruined whatever aesthetic enjoyment or spiritual nourishment you might have gotten from that way of writing, by putting it in a place where it can be seen from outside it rather than within it. But I really don't know what it is that I'm doing, and I have to hope that I am a clean enough vessel to allow these intuitive words into the world.

I'm creating experience, and what is existence except experience? I don't know that experience is all that exists, but it certainly makes up the greater part of reality that I'm aware of, and may make up all of it, in some not-too-strained understanding of "experience". So to a large extent I am creating a world just as much as an architect-and-contractor does by building a house, a school, or a prison. I am making this little artificial world, this place, out of dry things, these words which to echo I think Berkeley are dry inadequate pictures and relation-feelings, my "dry" which is not for me like desert air, or like the feeling of a certain kind of worn-

down carpet on bare feet, but rather like a certain ghostly essence that sort of touches on the carpet and the dry air, faintly and barely. You enter this ghost-world, and very well for you. I sit in this (physical) house and it is like a word with respect to a forest, though both are made of wood, and both stand up under the sun.

I'm making reality, but it is not I who make it, in large part.

In large part it is the regularities of the world I observe which make it (as I am in my capacity as mirror and regurgitator). In large part it is made out of feelings which come from who knows where, and from intentions and appetites. These could be from spirits or from a mysterious and immortal subconscious self. Where do these intuitions and feelings come from? They come from deep inside me, so deep that they are not me, or from beyond me. And I make a *house* out of this?

You try to live in this house at least for the duration of reading this, to the extent that you clothe your mind with it.

Very well, perhaps the very faintness of it will make it even less powerful. Some spirits are full, like a nectar, thick and full, like fruits blended up in a blender. But here, have some spirits which are the pale kind, the lightweight kind. These spirits are what I can offer, and I hope that the passage to symbol, ink, paper and binding has made them weak and safe, distant things. I hope that you do not meet my power, or meet the power that works in me. Stay away from power as much as you can, only go to that place when you must.

Please don't listen to what I have to say, listen to what you hear. The universe appears to be a happy and normal place, but only to some of us when we don't see certain things.

I am speaking when I slow down, and in my mind take a few steps, and sit down on the bench, and mark time a little bit, and then let go.

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What is it that I really want to say? Patience tells me not to say. You might be able to guess what I want to say. But it isn't for me to say it baldly, right here. My job is not to say what I want to say. I trust the spirit that tells me what to say -- but do I know that it's trustworthy? I trust perhaps blindly, perhaps I could trust better, I could trust the actual person behind what I say, or distinguish the trustworthy person from the untrustworthy, if there is a commingling as of iron with clay. But provisionally, I can say that I trust.

I will be myself when I am done. I will feel my desire to be myself, this image of what I want and of me getting it, tasted a little now though it comes in the future (that almost-horror time-bending called "desire"), feel the desire return to me from time to time, haunt me and unhaunt me, and perhaps animate me. Perhaps it is unsatisfied desire which is best in a writer: people you wish you could talk to, places you wish you could be, things to reach out to from where you are, reachings to reach out into sentences, sentences to put on a page, pages to bind, books to release to many people, most of whom you will never see. Nothing teaches you how to relate to nothing.

Patience is to be unsatisfied, and dissatisfaction is often the way of love, in a world which is ruled by untruth.

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Hobbes built a Leviathan using first words, and then letting go and it wasn't him, it was us who made the Leviathan.

And there had always been some kind of Leviathan, so Hobbes thought, I think, at least very far back in human history. There's an article or two I want to read when my mind is empty enough to fit them, about the Infrastructure Leviathan<sup>21</sup>. From what little I read, I can see that possibly what is meant is that we make infrastructure our sovereign, and use it as the thing which can't be argued with. Once we have that in place, we can let go of our self-determination, which helps us not to form warring factions to kill each other, or descend into anarchy, these last two being the obvious problems-to-be-fixed of liberalism, and self-determination being liberalism's awful sacrifice. Jaron Lanier (he of a forest-spirit) had something to say about lock-in, how little decisions technological pioneers make determine how people experience things years later.<sup>22</sup> For instance (I can't remember if this is Lanier's example), the Romans decided for some reason to make their roads a certain width. Roads get ruts and wagon wheels should fit them. Railroads might as well be built for wheels as far apart as wagons' -- so the Romans decided how wide the railroads would be.

Reality is determined in large part by people who have no idea what they're really doing, and sometimes it creates a seemingly-permanent inertia on society. The Infrastructure Leviathan, from the bit I read, is related to global climate change. We can't move fast enough to change our culture

and physical infrastructure because of inertia. Vinay Gupta talks about this on Twitter. He says our political structure is strangely enough 200 years old, in a world where there is rapid technological change and where time is running out. I have a little bit of acquaintance with computer programming, and I can see how, like Rome, America has patched itself over and over. And what is patched over and over will probably have to be started afresh, although the stakes of abandoning America (or the rest of the liberal democratic Leviathan-inertias) are higher than simply starting a new software project. So perhaps we will have to find some way to debug, simplify and refound on the fly -- a great life work for some ambitious young person who is pure in heart.

I had no idea I would end up here, where I am, when I started down this path that lead to the books I've written.

No idea -- not that I tried very hard to have an idea. I just rushed ahead. Things seemed so simple, and, in one of the kindnesses of my life, still do seem simple. Just keep going, one foot ahead of the other, don't worry too much about tomorrow or about your own well-being. Just keep moving, and don't question what you're doing, but don't deliberately not question either. Don't suppress your instincts, except when you do. Try hard because that's what your heart sort of blindly wants, what you consider trustworthy, but then sort of change your mind in the middle of doing things, and find yourself constrained, constrained, constrained or drawn, drawn, drawn, by numerous internal things you can't explain to yourself and had better not talk about too much with other people. A simple life which I take simply, by being not fully conscious of it as I live it.

So in this process there is patience and impatience: impatience in the common sense of not slowing down nor being deliberate nor concentrating on things to the end, and patience in the older sense of enduring (or living through without even feeling the endurance of) whatever there is, in the life mentioned above, not necessarily too much that was particularly painful or disintegrating, but just the *stuff* of life, the fiddling of it, the lack of control of it, the self-baffling of living it. Have you realized that you have to live your life as *yourself* your *whole life*? Even if you change as a person, it's still you. Don't think about it too hard. It's better to endure it without realizing you endure it.

You have to live with how you've started, with how you're founded, with your constitution. America has to be America until it dies, for better or worse. We have to live with the West, or even, as we globalize, with World Civilization, for better or worse, until it dies. Human beings can outlive civilizations, but there's quite a bit of inertia, and every word that fits into the civilization is part of that weight. The weight helps to keep us ballasted, the old heavy dead words of Hobbes (and kin) worked into fat documents with amendments and huge law books, and millions of people who have never really thought of another way, all of this keeps us from anarchy, all of this taken-for-grantedness.

Gupta might well want us to move beyond this culture, and he may be right that we have to pay a terrible cost for not getting rid of it. And Gupta can little be blamed for trying to warn us within the belly of the whale, using whale-belly speech, adding his own contribution to Western (or global) civilization. While I am thinking of what I am saying, or of



what Gupta is saying, the great reverberance of Westernness (Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Continental-English, social-technological, past and the assumptions of people I've grown up with) still reverberates, and I might wish that God could save me from it, and that wish would reverberate that structure once again. So much of me is tied up in thought-systems built into me -- so much that to really engage with Hinduism or from-what-it-seems-more-so indigenous thinking, is a threat to who I *am*. It's like if someone said "Well in our culture we have claws instead of hands". The only way I can get claws is by cutting off my hand, and I really have no concept of what claws can do, and if I thought about my life I would see that there really are situations where I couldn't do what I normally do if I had claws for hands. I can engage with these cultures in some limited way, but only from a certain distance. To admire the Aborigines for their Dreamtime is one thing, to Dream in my own way another (already a stretch), but to Dream according to their Dreams seems essentially impossible to me. This is not to say that it really is, but for its seeming, it will most likely never come to be, and my honest assessment is that that deepest level of engagement will never be in my life.

It might be desirable for me to shed all my accumulated thought-systems and just be myself, and what better way than to betray every system I've ever trusted in? How better to prove my independence than to make a formula rule me and attack things I genuinely have loved? How wonderful it is to apply formulas in a rigorous way! This is how we get the truth.

No, the things that I have chosen in my brief moments of freedom are like the re-posts and re-tweets which speak for me, like when a philosopher cites another philosopher to express a concept which secretly he or she believes not for philosophical reasons but which the other philosopher, happily, has demonstrated. If I wish to reject some aspect of Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Continental-English culture, perhaps that is me being authentically me, and perhaps even the desire to ally myself to radical self-reshaping or the belief that I don't really have a self would be, if it really was.

People and systems of thought and spirits want or tend to influence you. So what can you do? You just try to drift along and do your thing. You try to hold onto your mind when you realize what's going on, but you aren't always aware. You want to live a life that's always trustworthy.

That's what seems to me to be the solution. If you can just get the background of your whole life to be trustworthy, if you can get the story-writing machine or person to be set to "A trustworthy story" then whatever it is that intrudes into your story will be basically okay.

What is the authentic spirit of global civilization? How can civilization be true to itself? How can civilization grab hold of its mind. My initial take on Hobbes is that "Leviathan is fake, let's not let it be real". Hobbes wanted it to be real, at least real enough to govern us, though it was artificial. I can't suppose that there is a consciousness behind the system of global civilization, unless that consciousness is that of each citizen of the Leviathan. In that case, what is authentic human being? What are humans, really?

Some people say that there is no human nature. We choose our natures. I think this is true to an extent, as should be clear from the above. So then, in the moments where people really choose, what do they choose? What do we choose? We are choosing human nature. How do we choose, in the moments where we can choose?

I had an idea for a game where the player would bless or curse an environment. And the player would spontaneously notice things. When they blessed an area, it might heal anyone, player and monster, randomly, to a degree proportional to how many times it had been blessed. And a curse could strike whoever was there, monster or player, with lightning, at random. We live in environments, out of which things spontaneously occur. In the right environment, we can spontaneously notice that we even have a choice. A choice for the deliberate will which is not noticed is not a choice.

We have to share our environments with monsters and fellow players. Is there an environment in which we really make choices? This is what helps us to reveal who we really are.

Are we really going to choose hellishness and awfulness if we choose what we really are? Maybe. I don't know what is in all hearts. But hearts are so ghostly, small, pale, and weak, that while hell-on-earth is a great accumulation of little heart-moves, generations of ectoplasmic accretions into a nasty weight, each little ghost, if stripped from its systems, chooses a seemingly-cute little nastiness, or a seemingly insignificant little beauty. We are damned by

cute things, and saved by insignificant ones. I suspect that hell is mostly a system, and we choose it, ready-made, or if we can and want to, we don't. And yet the state of the heart does matter, and some might long to choose a certain kind of hell for themselves and other people. Those ghost-hearts that hate the well-being of all, or which wish to be their own little gods, so cute and vicious, might make themselves enemies. Are they genuine human beings, expressing human nature? I suppose they are. They create themselves so. Do these people exist? I don't know. It seems to me like they do, but that could be a deception. And am I qualified to condemn people? Do I want to wield that balance? What if my condemnation was self-fulfilling?

I don't really know the nature of people. We never really know the nature of people, those faint ghosts which are conscious, although their systems fill our gazes so forcefully.

We don't live unbiased lives. We seek to trust, heedlessly and fully and absolutely, and the only reason to be betrayed is to trust more truly, to open ourselves to a truer reality.

Trustworthiness seems to be similar for most people. There is a language of trustworthiness, the words of which are the environment made up of technological and natural "leaning posts" and we seem to all have similar rules for leaning.

Maybe if there was no language, we would all be together without dispute -- but then, I can't imagine exactly what we would experience, or how we could be ourselves.

Our lives are biased by pain and pleasure. We can be tempted. No one is supposed to ever have their actions determined by a temptation -- then it isn't a temptation. But

somehow temptations bias us to turn against ourselves.

What if the nature of people is inherently to choose reality?

We want to know experience to the fullest, and then we come to realize that experience and experiencers go together, and that as our bodies imply our minds, so do other bodies imply minds. And we realize that experience is experienced, and so people are indispensable and as real as we are. All this, just because we wanted to experience, and experience reality. An understandable hunger from beings which know they are real. So then we are tempted to deny our own reality by denying the reality of others. It's simple - with a simplistic view of human nature, we make convenient others, and betray ourselves.

Gupta wants to solve the problem of cultures lagging and being less than excellent and so unable to deal with climate change, which threatens the lives of hundreds of millions of people and could seriously harm civilization itself, leading to further harm. Perhaps some kind of more-technical intervention (either the technology of matter or a technology made out of people, like Hobbes' Leviathan) can heroically save our civilization. If I keep my eye on the specifics of climate change, it does seem as though the answer is something like that. Carbon scrubbing technology might be big. Wind and solar, certainly. Some kind of carbon tax. These are basic ideas, easily found on the Internet. But there are problems other than climate change.

Climate change threatens people who are developed with conditions resembling lack of development. But lack of development is already here. A problem in both developed and less-developed countries is cynical, simplistic thinking in government and business and whatever other elite. A lot

of false love is out there masquerading as true love, and that's nothing to say of the bald-faced hate. Evil spirits make their choices and push on the systems just so. People who have millions of dollars struggle spiritually, and people are poor and there's a middle class that doesn't see the world outside itself. We have a poverty of reality, all of us, materially rich, poor, and middle class, the poor constrained from obvious experience more so than the rich and middle class, the rich and middle class constrained more from seeing the true nature of reality, which is personal.

What is human nature? To an extent we can choose, but to an extent we cannot. I think the human heart would prefer to play with stickers and flowers and be annoying to its neighbors, and this level of individuality does not have to ruin life for everyone. But we live in a world in bondage to the evil of systems and those who manipulate systems and who manipulate us by getting us to think about how the world is manipulated by certain people (or spirits?). We may be children at heart, and this might save us, but we are also people capable of great profundity. I don't want to exclude anyone, but the gendered words "man" and "woman", convey something about a person which is not conveyed by "adult" or "grown-up", apart from their conveyances of "masculine" and "feminine". Whatever this thing is, so we can be, though our society makes it very difficult for us much of the time. We are capable of courage and patience, of focus and diligent work and yearning, of seeking and finding reality. The human heart is called to more than its preferences, and to the extent that it answers the call, can become broken and broken-down, loosing its clutching grasp, expanded and strengthened, made resilient and

frank, simple, transparent, clear, receptive, responsive, really able to trust.

To trust well is what gives us the personalities which can respond to the two challenges which face any civilization: resilience, and in quieter or more prosperous (but not necessarily safer) times, sustainability. To trust well, so that we can trust all the more, because trust is all our reward, because trust is all there really is.

## 18.

I'm waiting for my oatmeal afternoontime breakfast to cool off on a hot day. There is no need to eat it fresh off the stove.

It's not the hottest day of the days I have known in this area. Summer is only barely beginning.

Part of me is impatient with this heat, but I don't realize it at first. Then I realize that I'm being hasty and anxious, and when I slow down and take one step at a time and breathe, while the external temperature is exactly the same, I feel no taste of affliction.

The heat is not infinite, but when I am hasty, it is as though it is infinite. If I don't let myself look at it, I don't see that it's finite. Hasty tripping forward doesn't see reality as it is, always looks over reality's shoulder.

A hot day makes me think of climate change. The horrors of climate change include mass famine. Will these horrors come to pass? They seem likely, and they are undeniable as horrors, as things to see in the future, which we have some calling, duty, compulsion, addiction to facing. Horrors are infinite to us, evil is finite. Evil has extra power over us by its infinite prestige, a great cause of further finite evil.

Nothing is infinite, unless God is infinite and the world I observe is an illusion.



It is possible to be so afflicted that while one might try to be patient, there is nothing but suffering. I imagine that starving to death is a loss of the self, and that you might do anything while starving, or nothing, regardless of who you are. But even in countries where there is famine, there are people who make it to see the next generation, and some of them have enough food to be themselves, and to be able to choose between patience and impatience.

In the wealthy countries of now, those of us who are capable of doing whatever finite good we can are often disabled by impatience. It's beautiful and odd that we can teach everyone in the developed world, both billionaire and struggling worker and outcast and child, the exact same lesson to everyone's benefit: which is how to suffer exactly what you suffer and no more, which is the courage to endure and change and see other people. The instincts of giving up wealth can be consonant with the instincts of enduring affliction without cursing. They can also be consonant with the instincts of survival. This is beautiful and strange.

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Spiritual, supernatural evil is different from suffering.

Supernatural evil purports to unspeakably mislead you into unspeakableness, to consume you in a way you can't articulate. The idea of infinity is itself a finite thing. Or perhaps I am wrong, and infinity really exists, in which case our only hope is some good being who is infinite. From the point of view of a person acting in the world as it appears, speaking from what I can best know, however, nothing is infinite, and evil deceives by creating the idea of infinity of

itself. And this is an unspeakable misleading. There is plenty of real, finite evil for us; "sufficient to the day is its own troubles" relates.

I might say (I am getting used to the doctrine which I have proposed) that everything is real, but not everything is trustworthy. As long as we have the choice to withhold our trust, there is no infinity to a phenomenal reality. So perhaps infinity could be, but doesn't have to be, to the extent that we can choose how to respond to it. A human being can create infinity out of a few well-timed words.

There is a frightening slavery and bondage that we can get into. In that sense, infinity is real. But if we can be aware that infinity doesn't have to be real, then it is limited, and no longer infinity. So we can destroy infinity, although sometimes it seems like we can't, and we just don't. It is not always possible to live in finite reality, but we can choose to, and there is something very trustworthy about this. Simply by contemplating finitude and infinity, we are given the choice of which reality to trust.

When I am in one of my not infrequent dark or stormy or painful moods, I remember "this will pass", just as surely as my exulting moods, I remember, will pass. My moods in which I am callous and blank and empty will pass. Normality (such as I experience it), will pass. I find trustworthy that this is so, in a sense, I am happy for it, in the sense that I recognize it as trustworthy. Nothing is infinite, and in this way, I can have reality. There is something outside the moment. I am still a person living the moment, and it is not impermanence which impresses me or in which I trust, nor am I impressed by living in the moment, "being here now".

There is something incomplete about even my recognition of finitude if it does not connect to the finitude of God, therefore the way in which I can love him. Even if God is ultimately infinite, it is better that I love him as though he is finite, because that is the deeper love.

I think there must be some correlation between modernity and infinity, and thus a correlation between whatever truly gets beyond modernity and finitude. So then patience is part of how we can get beyond whatever is bad in modernity, to the extent that that bad connects to the overall listening-to of the spiritual reality of infinity.

There are different ways to approach experience. One way is to say that it is all there is. There are different versions of this. Animals, I can guess, experience experience as all there is with no margin at all (except perhaps for some of the animals closest to humans in mental type). There is nothing outside the present moment, and this is a massive vulnerability experientially. Have you ever seen a rabbit explode out of its place because you walked by, you who had no intention of harming it, and made no clear moves against it? A rabbit without the infinity of having nothing but the moment (an infinity which can't even be seen, because infinity is a seeing of the beyond: so I shouldn't call this "infinity", although it is like infinity) might calmly hop away in proportion to the threat. Certainly it is prudent for rabbits to make space between themselves and humans.

But that explosion, I intuit or infer, is the rabbit with nothing but the present moment. And there are people who are closer to being like animals in that, people who are true,

through-and-through empiricists, who (intentionally or not) trust in experience completely or near-completely.

There are also the empiricists who look beyond the moment.

There are two kinds of rationalists: English and continental, and both of them use reason to look beyond the moment, but they are using the axioms of reason and the interrelation of experiences, both of which they, after all, experience to be true.

These two types, and points in between, account for a great amount of Western people. But it is conceivable that there is some kind of outside to experience which has nothing to do with experience, and may never, but may, just, when it does. Some religious or spiritual people might see this as infinite hope, and a few (or a few who in a sense wisely keep themselves from religion or spirituality), might see the utter abject horror of the view.

I think my view all along throughout my life has been that reality is finite because God keeps it finite. I don't think infinity is purely an illusion, simply because in some sense any experienced reality is real. But God, as an experienced reality in my mind, whether conceived to be really infinite and thus able to slay infinite evil in a *psychomachia* of sorts, or God as the intimate person who takes care of my mind so that it is not beguiled by powerful lies which are only spiritual words -- either way, in whichever frame of mind whichever way speaks to, God is the one who brings finitude to me. Having brought me finitude, I am more adept at addressing the world in its numerous finite evils, and I think I'm more qualified for this task than for wrestling with

infinite things (except insofar as I can leave the infinite way of thinking myself). I am more qualified, that is, I am qualified just to the extent which I am.

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What are the limits of human nature? Evidence (of a certain sort) suggests that much of human personality is determined by genes. I can be skeptical of the power of genes to determine things, thinking that physical reality is just a particular way to paint things, and that what is deeper is the spiritual world, that genes are a fiction, something painted on, but they really seem to have been painted on, and I shouldn't assume from their having been painted that they won't keep being painted. I don't want to be taken in by the prestige of genes, nor by the kind of prestige-analog of insisting that genes can be ignored. I guess my position, like anyone's, is that genes (or whatever other fixed factors) are part of the story, as far as we can tell, and things up to the individual to change are part of the story. Where to draw the exact line remains to be proved. I am not as fully aware of what natural science says (or begins to say) about where that line is, and to an extent, I don't want to be. God can do things that fly under the radar of science, God can keep the miracles away from the studies so that scientists can't see them (which might be of a sort of pragmatic value to God, given that materialism can protect people from spiritual darkness; or perhaps there are other reasons why God can't show himself to materialists on that level, some kind of negotiation with the darker spiritual forces). In all, I don't want to assume that even God can't change things, and the more I fill my mind with images of limits, the more I think

we're limited, because what I see I believe, for better or worse. I don't want to be limited by false limits -- that is not a desirable kind of finitude, and puts infinity in a better light.

I don't want any reader to assume that any given limit they believe in is false -- after all, it might really apply. But I would want the reader to have a looser grip on the conviction that human nature is fixed, both in the sense that they might change it as it may appear to them to be trustworthy to do so and that as they hold it, they hold it in a looser way, with a looser tonality of thinking.

"Miracles aside...", I want to begin, and the discussion should put them aside, to an extent. It doesn't seem like it's God's way to perform miracles all the time or for most people -- that would certainly show up in a way we couldn't deny. One could say that very consistent miracles constitute physics -- and that very consistent miracles don't tend to communicate personality, for some reason (although some, like George Berkeley and probably a number of other modern Christians, have found physical laws to speak of divinity). But the nature of physical laws, miraculous though they may be, is such that human nature can appear a certain way, and that way is not necessarily consistent with trust, trustworthiness, resilience, or sustainability, and is such that God does not appear to consistently work to make this not the case.

So then, given physical laws, how much can human nature change, in a widescale way? What we want when we want human nature to change is largely for the systems within

human beings to change, not necessarily for their deeper hearts to change. The deep heart and the free will of a person is small, and often we just want other people to act like benevolent machines to us (sophisticated machines though that benevolence may require them to be). With the people we truly love and experience, we eventually may come to appreciate that deeper side of them. A person who appears beautiful and good, we may find, is simply a good robot, with good systemic inertia, who deep down does not have a really good heart. Likewise the opposite can be true. And on this deeper or deepest level, we find people really trustworthy, or not. But when people engineer society, they tend to want the vivid and obvious >99.5% of existence to be trustworthy. Ultimately, from God's perspective, it is the true and almost ineffectual deep heart of a person that matters, because systems are a clothing of people, and clothes aren't too difficult to change. The vivid and obvious part of reality can certainly tempt a person to having an unreal heart, or encourage them to trust and grow, and the governors of visible reality can make it their aim to make trust a viable option in the societies they govern. The heart can always change, by definition, unless it's dead, and though the heart is small and quiet, hearts' accretions build a culture. But because culture oppresses the heart, perhaps the heart cannot always really change. Or, somehow it both always can, and can still be heavily biased not to, and over a culture, this bias becomes a concrete certainty.

For a governor of systems, it is encouraging to note that while humans all seem to have similar basic drives, and tend to have very similar genes, their lives can play out radically differently based on their social and physical environments.

There are or were numerous pre-modern societies, and while they have similarities (differences they all tend to have with modern societies, as well as similarities with modern societies), they often worked differently and believed differently and related within themselves differently. I've read of a few, such as the Mardu<sup>23</sup> of Australia and the Yānomamö<sup>24</sup> of the Amazon. The Mardu struck me as being like kind and imaginative children, while the Yānomamö seem pushy and scheming. They each had different environments, and that had something to do with it. The Mardu lived in a dry place and were thus vulnerable enough that they lived in small groups and couldn't be harsh or suspicious to outsiders, with whom they would have to someday be guests when their territory was in drought.

Other cultures (I haven't finished the Yānomamö book, so I don't know yet if this applies to them), have more secure food sources, so they can be territorial and thus suspicious.

The environment consists both of what we find and what we make, both technology and natural surroundings. So we have done a big anthropological experiment with ourselves with industrialization, and a notable one begun in my lifetime of widespread Internet usage. While the pre-modern societies may or may not have been aware of how their techno-physical environments affected their cultures, we certainly can be. I suppose the hope of a governor of social systems is to make it so that there is a system to speak of at all, but it could also be thought, how to make it so that human beings, hearts, are not biased so much to be unreal.

Certainly there is a lot of overlap between "the system not falling apart" and "the system makes it easier or more



apparent for people to trust". Part of this has to do with technological and physical environment. The way we build houses and cities, and the way that (or the fact that) we respond to greenhouse gases and soil exhaustion and ocean acidification and (...) affects culture. We might if nothing else shape ourselves as people living in a world of limitation.

But I intuit or suspect that there may be something endogenous to culture. For instance, it has been said that the United States was really, more deeply founded (than by Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, and so on) by migration patterns of European subcultures. Each subculture had its own collective personality, and these have been handed down to this day, with some mutation, having formed the overall spirit of various American regions, one which a growing-up child or newly 18-year-old adult could hardly question, could often hardly even think to question.

Cultures are what they are and are what they mostly have been. Cultures are social organisms with their own logic, and their own dynamics which resemble free will (perhaps might be the complex interactions of many human hearts).

Two different corporations can make about the same product and be in the same regulatory and competitive environment, but one might be much less psychologically draining and traumatizing to work at. So this is a kind of collective, systemic human nature which is directly accessible to those who lead culture itself, rather than those who govern human systems. While typically these culture leaders (often artists, philosophers, or religious figures) necessarily have to live in their own appetites and visions (because that is how culture tends to work, appetites leading appetites), it is somewhat possible for them to be

aware of what is outside their experience, and to think of the realities of governing social systems or dealing with ecology.

I think the liberal thinkers changed our culture and our spiritual reality enormously, even though the change came in because they were telling us how to make social systems not fall apart. What you say is reality, what you say is to be feared, what you say "salvation" consists of, what you image forth as what you trust in, is very influential, and this is done by anyone who speaks persuasively or attractively, whether they speak of fixing social machinery (or physical machinery), or of God.

We tend to think that genes are important in determining personality, but I wonder how much our data for that comes largely from modern societies, in which we are (semi-intentionally) not equipped to help or make people change.

People don't have to be natural, but modernity looked to nature, that is what modernity saw-and-adhered-to. Being unnatural is not necessarily a violation of who you are, because your nature, as you understand it, isn't necessarily who you are. (Certainly it can be, though, which is a reason why modern individualism is partly trustworthy.)

## 19.

I saw something on Twitter about how Western media misrepresents the Nazi symbol as a "swastika", a Sanskrit word, when in reality it is a "Hakenkreuz". *Hakenkreuz* is the German word for "hooked cross". So the Twitter account was claiming, through a piece of text I presume came from some other source, that Nazism is a more inherently Christian thing than it could be said to be Indian, and that the use of terminology was a way to slander Indian culture.

I don't know how true this claim is, and I mean that literally. Checking Wikipedia, I see that the swastika symbol (which could be named anything) is widespread in ancient culture. The article reports the historical line of thought that the symbol had a rediscovery in late 19th century Germany, taken as a symbol of the very ancient German people, who were associated with India through the "Indo-European" cultural connection. It seems from that, that it was taken essentially as a symbol of a race of people, like a bloodline or a culture, some kind of connection to ancestors and collective ancestry. Whether this is true, I don't know, and I wouldn't assume everything on Wikipedia is necessarily true, especially if it's in any way open to controversy.

The Twitter account's screen-captured text associated Nazism with Edward Bellamy. Checking Wikipedia, it seems that Bellamy's utopian nationalist socialism did partially inspire Nazism. Bellamy was a Christian socialist, and so the

Twitter account wants to connect Nazism to Christianity, not Indianness.

In 1890, when Bellamy was active, how could he have known he was going to contribute to the Holocaust and the other evils of Nazism? As near as I can tell, it is his nationalism that should have been a red flag to him. At that time, socialism wouldn't have had its dark side exposed (the Western world having its gaze filled by capitalism's dark side, and totalitarian socialism not having yet been put into practice). But nationalism was old and had given evidence of its nature and it's conceivable that Bellamy could have woken up to it.

Is nationalism a bad thing? It is perhaps Christian to say so, but it is also English to say so. I use the term "English" to connect to the stream of thought and spirit that began sometime before Hobbes and Locke, and includes such optimists as Berkeley, even-tempered people like Hume, which can be seen in British liberalism, Progress with a capital "P", the British Empire, all the liberal pride of the United States, the English (and also to a large extent the British) as they went around the world. I could include in "Englishness" empiricism, philosophical pragmatism, and political pragmatism, and thus include as fellow travelers thinkers on the European continent and elsewhere in the world. I do not think that everything in this paragraph is necessarily true in all its details, although I don't know specifically what might be false. However, I do think that it is true enough that there is something like a distinctive pattern of thought and spirit which can at least be loosely associated with something that happened in English culture

sometime before 1500. It did not happen to take as strong a root in French culture, but if England hadn't existed, it might have been France that produced it, or some other European culture. Given time, it might have arisen even in Indian culture, or whatever other non-Western culture.

In a way, I think the Nazis might shed some light on nationalism. They were into what was *völkisch*, which from a naive English-speaker's translation-from-afar (my own) means "people-ish". Nazi nationalism was all about people, not about the state. The state was for the sake of the people, it was effective and pragmatic, but what the Nazis were really interested in was people, people as heritage, bloodline, collective ancestry. (Or perhaps the Nazis weren't entirely, or really, but certainly this was part of it and a bald and obvious part of their ideology.)

Who are my people? Both my parents come from families that have a kind of distinctiveness; more, or less, self-conscious. The families were never prominent in their communities on the level of local aristocracy or celebrity (as far as I know), but internally they have their own identity which can be distinguished from the culture around us. My people are the Churches of Christ, the denomination I grew up in and which I still have a kind of "people-ish" affinity to. My people are Christians at large. To a lesser extent, my people are Americans and the Southern Americans and Midwestern Americans and Southern Californian Americans which I identify as my cultural roots. My people are philosophers and monastics, of whatever religion, but especially Christian. My people are Linux users and fans of the bands I like. This might actually sound like a heart-

stirring expression of how I connect to other people, and if you share enough of my kinships, you might want to seek me out, trip over yourself, and you and I could raise a flag.

But I have had to learn to be wary of all this. My family contains madness and a sense of superiority which can be conduits for evil to enter the world, and the Churches of Christ have had abuses through them (as have all churches), and their distinctiveness has led to bitter superiority rancor against all the other distinctive Christian groups, nationalism versus nationalism, ethnic pride versus ethnic pride, because "ethnos" is people, ethnicity (from a naive philological point of view; from afar) is *völkisch*, and is more essentially about spiritual heritage, however traced, than it is about genes and genealogy charts.

And America is a nation of good and evil, of beauty and horror, and I don't mean to create a beautiful image of balance by contrasting "good" and "evil", "beauty" and "horror", but in my English way I want to include all the facts. But America's genocides, its racism, its liberal (right-wing and left-wing) cynicism and hypocrisy, its political pragmatism making "strange bedfellows" of people (instance of, or not far from, political prostitution), the way it gives itself over to work and money and measurable achievement and optimization, the way it writes off some people's suffering as insignificant, the way it believes in itself so naively; and then the ways in which America is anti-America in its worst ways of being anti-America -- all these are ways that evil is given birth in the world, and the knowledge of them must be taken as full bitter medicine along with the sweet thoughts of American (relative) liberty,

stability, prosperity, local cooperation, hope, participatoriness, as well as other endemic beauties.

And philosophy is the pursuit of reasoned thinking, and reason is brutal, reason disintegrates human experience, destroys knowledge and human health, reduces experience to meaninglessness and nothing, and is a tool for Power, and as a rallying flag collects people with the characteristic blind spots of those who can't relate to human beings. And monasticism similarly has had abuse attached to it, and while I think it's inherently more trustworthy (to the extent that it is truly monastic and thus watches for evil), there is paranoia nipping at its heels, and spiritual ambition. And Linux is one side in online religious wars, and the bands that I like, through no ill-intention of their own, only affirm aspects of my personality that I already like, mirroring me in the good and bad of them -- and there are many good things which bring blindspots to us when we are too proud of them, and through blindspots we can let Satan into the world.

To the extent that I have already talked about Christianity, it doesn't have as many horrors left to it, and has more beauty. But there is a reason why Jesus warned his disciples from the yeast of the Pharisees. And Christian identity, because it is ethnic identity, is inherently vulnerable to blind spots.

There is even a further nationalism, the nationalism of myself. My past selves are the spiritual forebears of me, and I carry on their heritage. I am internally nationalist, ethnic, *völkisch*. I take myself personally, this is the nature of experience, very often, and I take my people groups personally. The group is me.

And now for the dissents to nationalism.

One dissent is the characteristically English dissent. The English (to be clear, not necessarily the people genetically descended from the peoples who have lived in England, but rather spiritual Englishness) deny their own nationalism, and this can be seen in the early English liberals, who tried to tame religious and ethnic strife by breaking people's ties to their old rallying flags, subordinating them to the organism of systemic power, the secular sovereign. Hobbes opposed pride.

When the English colonized India, and other places, they brought with them this pride-breaking way. And the Twitter account I mentioned above, I think, is trying to assert itself against this English heritage of denigrating others' nationalism.

Were the British colonizers really not nationalistic? The early liberal thinkers may not have been -- I don't know either way. But the British colonizers were. British patriotism existed. But perhaps some of them were patriotic in a dishonest way, not realizing that they were. Their antinationalism, speaking of the British as a colonizing whole, was not real, and so the Indians have seen hypocrisy in the British.

There is a kind of anti-nationalism in America. There are people who could be happy to follow along with my mentioning of American genocide and racism and so on, who would feel that I was speaking the truth and that we



two were both against nationalism. And they are against nationalism, anyone who opposes America, against a nationalism. But to oppose nationalism itself, one must remember that the Nazis were in large part about people-groups, and not about nation-states or Leviathans. And so the anti-America people often (although not necessarily always) have their own nationalisms, which differ from honest or blatant American nationalism in that they don't have a state as obviously behind them. There is a difference between nationalism that has the power of a state associated with it, and nationalism that doesn't, and it could be that the anti-America nationalists will or would use state power differently than the (right-wing and left-wing liberal) American nationalist politicians if they had the power of the state -- but they are still nationalists. However, like the British liberals, they can with some success deny to themselves that they are nationalistic.

*Völkisch*-ness is the love of people. And each human being has a limited point of view, and so can only love (in the full, fleshly, vivid, obvious, natural, "honest" way) those who are linked by chains of relevance and trust. And so the love of people turns into *völkisch*-ness, the love of our own people. And so how can we escape it?

The ideal way is to be innocent of it. Small-enough children are innocent of nationalism. We often are such children with respect to nationalism. There are moments in our lives in which nationalism as a spiritual reality is entirely irrelevant. Perhaps it is still a part of our lives, though, baked into the systems we follow without awareness.

One could attempt to love all people, and to love the whole world. Sometimes this can work. Sometimes a detachment from the people around you can allow you to connect more justly with those you can only see in a ghostly way.

But this has the downside of denying the full, fleshly, vivid, obvious love, and while full fleshliness and vividness and obviousness are a form of experiential power, and thus are to be watched, taken with "fear and trembling", love in its power does do good, and the world cries out both for love in its power as well as love apart from power.

I don't want to set up an opposition between flesh and spirit, and there is another way to think about things.

After thinking about this, there is a literal people group which I would like to deliberately align myself, and that is the people of the Old Testament, the people weeping by the waters of Babylon, remembering with ambivalence their national history, the way that their kings whored them out to false gods, and their people wandered from the truth time and again, how their David was an adulterer and their Moses wasn't pure in heart enough to enter the promised land (and so then, who is?). If there is no god, or if YHWH is not God, then the Israelites who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures were remarkably honest to see the horror and ambivalence of their past and of power (the historians of the Hebrew Scriptures don't have much interest for power after Solomon, which would have been the main interest of a secular historian), to prefigure a nationalism that defuses nationalism. If the Israelites' God were truly God, they came by that perception of themselves through the work of God in

their hearts as they honestly remembered their past and held it up against what God had said, about how they thought they were chosen but had lost their way, -- the work in them of the God who knows tragedy himself.

I don't think that the Israelites of the Captivity fully got the work that was begun in them. But that is the way of spiritual ancestors. So I would like to be one of the chosen people, spiritually speaking, those chosen, for the most part, to eventually actually be anti- or a-nationalistic. Zionism seems like a clear departure from this role, and I can understand why the Jews would want their own nation-state, as much as the Indians or any other oppressed people group. I can understand why Americans and Israelis would want to be nationalists, and why Palestinians and indigenous people would want to be nationalists, and why Christians identify as a nation in their hearts.

But I don't want to be nationalist.

And that sentence just written, so easily taken as a slogan, following on this chapter's essay which is a political speech, is a political declaration, and immediately sets up its own nationalism. So what can I do? I can say that there is truth in all this, but I can't speak the truth out loud. When it is spoken out loud, it renders itself false. So, because I'm nothing (in a large sense) but a stream of words, my silence, which is what this topic needs, will have to come by a change of subject.

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There are some nationalisms which I did not mention, which are as old as any large-scale nationalism, and come along with any family. These are the nationalisms of gender and the nationalisms of generation. Sexuality (as distinct from gender) can also be a nationalism.

<sup>16</sup>That is, in the style evident in *Sometime in the 21st Century*, *The Tree With Unimaginable Roots*, *Variations*, and *Silence*, but not *Letters to People Who Care*.

<sup>17</sup>Ennodius, translated in Lewis' *The Allegory of Love*, p. 78 (in 1959 Oxford University Press ed.)

<sup>18</sup>Here taken to mean "the trusting that everything will work out in the end in some way we do not yet specifically see".

<sup>19</sup>"All Together" by Dougie MacLean

<sup>20</sup>*Beyond Sing the Woods*, p. 196 (1936 Literary Guild edition)

<sup>21</sup>"The World We Built" by Jedidiah Purdy and "Out from Emergency" by Katrina Forrester and Jedediah Purdy, both published in *Dissent*.

<sup>22</sup>*You Are Not a Gadget*, ch. 1

<sup>23</sup>in *The Mardu Aborigines* by Robert Tonkinson

<sup>24</sup>*Yanomamö* by Napoleon Chagnon

**AUGUST**

## 20.

I had intended to wait one more day to begin writing for the month of August, and I waited with commitment, amid a somewhat uncomfortable desire to write, feeling some amount of pain from not writing. Today is 31 July. I write it that way but when I talk I say "July Thirty-first", as an American.

I'm thinking about exile and home today. I think the home for me is exile, but I want to make my home in a world that is not my home -- this world. And I would do better to hold to the identity of exile.

I don't know how much more I have to add to this book. You, the reader, know, but you can't tell me. I ran through thoughts in my head as to what I would write, but I forgot a lot of those ideas. Yet, they may still be in my head, in pieces. I like the metaphor of plowing plants under, like when farmers plant vetch for its nitrogen.

I won't prevent myself from writing more in the next few days if something occurs to me, but I will try a summing-up right now, as a fitting ending for a book.

For reasons that might be arbitrary or symbolic, which were certainly not intended in advance, I have held off on publishing some older books, and then after deciding to release them, wrote some new books. I feel a kind of weight or responsibility or held-onto reality in me of all these

things, and I imagine the feeling of freedom when they are published, but I can't quite imagine what I'll do, an example of Max Stirner's observation that you can't predict what slaves will do when they get their freedom. Freedom speaks its own language.

"But my life -- believe it or not" (I tell myself) "is easy."

Because it won't be long, and it already is now, that there are people with much more difficult problems than mine, people exhausted and hungry at the end of every day, or people living in fear of their governments, or of the people who can do what they want when the government doesn't work. I don't understand their lives, and I wonder how they manage it. I think that it must not be infinitely difficult to be them, although finite difficulty can be too much.

I don't think I'll ever have to live their lives, and instead, I am in the position to help them. I am able to work and to give. I have a kind of responsibility, which is also an opportunity. I am very fortunate.

People are harmed such that they do not trust. People are hurt, but they keep trusting, trusting themselves and other people. They are not forced to mistrust, or to withdraw trust, or to go dead which in a way is a form of absence of trust.

Death is a limit on trust. The animals that are alive in the field are hunted and run in fear but they live. The worst experiences are those that destroy your self-trust.

We will certainly face global climate change, and other than that, who can say? Climate change, at first, will present to many people as the problem of the relationship of the

"have"s (with functioning institutions and material wealth) and the "have not"s (with less-functioning institutions and less material wealth). Climate change will be about the stress on social systems and physical environments, and the attempt to overcome physical and social problems. Climate change stresses and underdevelopment are hard to tell apart, in a lot of ways, and development, whatever its culture and practices, is the profession of dealing with it. In the last year or two I had thought of development as being played out -- not for development workers or the people they serve, but for me as a writer, because it seemed as though it was on track to solve the problem of poverty in some not too distant future. But climate change will be with us for centuries, as far as I've heard.

Some of my books attempt to incite people to become committed problem-solvers, and given my educational background and interests, I think I may have emphasized international development as an important field. If we try to think globally, we might think that underdevelopment is the problem which most affects those who suffer most. There is a moral element to this.

The moral and the existential can be in conflict. So some people want a functioning state, while other people want justice. There's a lot of disagreement over this. But social systems need physical and social help to stay together, and I think functioning social systems help keep the world order stable, and help us to minimize how much fossil fuel we burn in war or industry, and help us to avoid any other "tragedies of the commons" affecting climate. If we, the nations and people-groups, cooperate, we can reduce the impact of



climate change, preventing suffering and perhaps the collapse of civilization, which I have heard is the greatest fear of most people who fear climate change. No country is an island -- all social systems interrelate. Therefore it is in our existential interest to do what is moral, to help those who might cry for help, and likewise moral to do what is in our existential interest, to save all for all. While life is a vale of tears, full of toil, this harmony is a consolation.

"Development" implies a direction, from X, to Y. Or, from a set of Xs, to a set of Ys. Where are we headed, as a civilization, or set of civilizations? I will be intentionally oblique or opaque on this topic, because in a way, we all have to participate in the process of figuring out our values and where we're headed. We all have to each for ourselves see the hand of a value reached out to us, and with some kind of gladness take it. I have said what I've said, so far, and maybe I'll keep saying things, as to what the values of our final sustainability should be.

We will either have an actually good sustainability someday, from which we will never desire to deviate, or we will have some kind of bad sustainability, perhaps as bad as that of *1984*. We aren't powerful enough to make a real heaven or hell, but we can make convincing proxies. An imperfect world in which people have real love and trustworthiness (in the midst of occasional betrayal and a kind of poverty) to me could be a proxy for heaven, and a world like that of *1984*, if it could really manage to last forever, or, from my perspective, as with Winston's, "forever-enough", would be a proxy for hell.

I would want to live in a heaven of maximal trustworthiness and trust, and a similar sustainable society. In that society, I wouldn't minimize suffering, nor even betrayal, but instead seek to maximize trust. Betrayal can even be trustworthy, although it's risky to us. Yet in heaven there would (or will) be no betrayal.

Abraham (it is said) was called by God. Where did he come from? Ordinary life. Where was he going to? A place he never saw. He saw Canaan, but he never saw the real promised land. What is this land, if not the land of trust?

And what was Abraham's experience on the way if not numerous tests of trust? Abraham failed some and passed others, and a Christian writer saw him as a hero of faith, of trust. Abraham was never home, and so it is for those who belong to trust. If we live for a truly good world, we will never live to see it come -- yet for moments, in our proxy heavens or hells of civilization, we fully trust, everything we experience in the moment, everyone present -- and who can say that there is no heaven in the end? I can't say that, at least.

Religious people sometimes are opposed to civilization, because civilization does not connect people to God. But if civilization is about trust rather than about power or pleasure or painlessness or development or civilizational outworking for its own sake, then I see less of a reason for fear. God's interests and civilization's can be aligned, and so religious people can preach the good news through helping people with their social problems (reducing betrayal, encouraging trust), strengthening them with material aid. Those who learn to trust, who trust trust, are

those who can trust anything at all, including the somewhat-invisible God.

(Certainly this goes for Christianity, and I think Judaism, and perhaps Islam, the Abrahamic religions. I wish I knew more about the non-Christian religions. But I think all religion is at least in part about trust. Even the religions which impede trust do so by promising an ultimate trustworthiness.)

Patience is a kind of trust, a trust in the whole of life, a trust that there is another moment, an openness to what is endured, to the extent that we can trust it despite its pain. Patience is a skill for getting through time.

Perhaps I am ending this book right now. If I am, then it seems fitting to talk about resilience. We have to live through stressful times -- and even through ennui or *acedia*.

What we have before us is to work diligently and patiently, enduring what comes our way patiently, both the good and the bad.

## 21.

It occurs to me today that it would be good to talk about practical things. If you want to help with the health of social systems in the world, what can you do? In other words, if you want to help make it so that people can connect with reality, what can you do?

I am loath to provide specific ideas in a public setting, because they channel people into the same areas, unless people think for themselves. I can say that anyone can be a better friend, and that good friendships, especially those which are open to doing bigger things, are beneficial to helping the world. Good friendships can become good communities.

It's desirable for people from one culture to help another, but it's also dangerous. It might be better to encourage people in other cultures in doing their best in, or with, their own systems, than to try to fix their systems. Working on the systems of your own culture can be good for other cultures, because cultures often have similar or the same problems, and can be inspired by successes in other cultures.

It is important to desire the end state for yourself, to really love what you think you love. This will help you find what specific thing to do, and hopefully keep you from some of the worst mistakes that come from trying to help people. At best, you will be called by some aspect of reality, joining a

new path, which might be long and hard. And then you will know what to do.

Sometimes the spirit speaks in gentleness better than in ambition. In other words, if you let yourself be receptive, your path will speak to you. Maybe you will see a person in your life you didn't see before, or remember an interest that connects with people's well-being.

Diminishing returns is the idea that the first plate of food really hits the spot but the second, less so, and the third stuffs you up uncomfortably. Or, it's the idea that you pick the low-hanging fruit with little effort, first, leaving the harder-to-reach fruit higher up, which you can pick with more effort. You get less out than you put in, the more you take.

You can make time for yourself to be reflective. Perhaps you can make 20 minutes a day. What would you sacrifice to make that happen? Some people really are pushed to the limit with their time, but it's costly to never be reflective, even if you have a lot of worthy or urgent or unavoidable things to do. Many people, however, could do a budget of their time and find ways to trade away less-reflective uses of time for more reflective uses. For instance, perhaps you watch three hours of TV a day. Consider, which TV shows would you watch if you only watched an hour of TV a day?

Those might really be worth watching. You can easily keep watching those. The second hour a day is nice, but doesn't hit the spot quite as well. But maybe you can keep that too.

The third hour, and beyond, tend to be things you watch on autopilot. That's where you can sacrifice, without really

missing much. So instead of 20 minutes, you can free up an hour.

It can be hard to be reflective. Some people are most reflective in conversation with other people. Other people find their environment "telling" (or literally telling) them not to be reflective. It can sometimes be good to get away by yourself. I find that walking outside helps me to be reflective. After a draining day at work, a person could numbly watch TV, and this would be appealing. But if it's light out (or not too dark), and the neighborhood is basically safe, you could go walk around the neighborhood for 20 minutes, just as numb, but at least moving and getting fresh air. And maybe the numbness would wear away. TV and sitting encourage numbness, but walking, without being a particularly difficult thing experientially or cognitively, encourages mild wakefulness. With enough of this wakefulness, you can be reflective.

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One thing that's helpful with respect to climate change is to alter your consumption patterns. A few years ago, I decided to cut back on animal protein, mainly to see if I could. I thought that in the future, I might have to do this due to food scarcities, and I wanted to see if I could adapt. The principle of diminishing returns applied. The first adjustment I made was easy. I quit eating meat, except fish and seafood, and I cut my milk with water, reasoning that I drank quantities of it that were more about hydration than about getting calcium or protein. I rarely miss meat, and I prefer watered-down milk to regular milk now, except when I

want something rich, and rich things, as I think of "rich", are things I would never want very often. Eventually, I quit eating fish and seafood as well, and that wasn't particularly hard.

However, more recently, I've been trying to reduce dairy even further, and it's been a bit harder. I think cutting milk in half and getting rid of meat made the biggest difference in terms of resources consumed (and animals unfree or suffering), but there is still room to cut.

In the past few years, I've tried to cut my spending, in part to make it easier to keep writing. I found myself getting to the point where saving money was starting to cost me money. It's a little strange that it's difficult to live on less than \$20,000 a year if I try (I live on about \$21,000, as of last year) and yet that's a nice middle-class income in a lot of the world. The GDP per capita of the US is \$40,000 a year or so, and that might be considered a nice middle-class income (I would consider it such), and oddly, I doubt our lives are two times better than \$20,000 a year in a developing country. We prefer our lives in the US at \$40,000, but we don't necessarily choose rationally.

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Listening to an episode of *Citations Needed*<sup>25</sup>. It's a dose of the basic climate of thought (I take the episode this direction, at least) thinking about how people who are powerful will stay powerful and do what they want, preserving evil systems, for all time. *1984* is a bad

sustainability, in clear form, but what we have is a bad, but not as bad, not as sustainable sustainability. It sustains itself, for now.

If billionaires are powerful and completely cut off from the voices of the powerless, then what hope do any of us have, except violent revolution? Actually, there is another possibility, which is that classes in power are inherently unsustainable in some way. The hope in *1984* is that the Inner Party might lose interest eventually, or turn on itself.

Perhaps Oceania isn't really physically sustainable (Orwell never says that it is) and would collapse under ecological pressures. Then we would enter a time of anarchy, and then what?

The book *Albion's Seed*<sup>26</sup> talks of how specific, somewhat random, idiosyncratic social groups from Europe were transplanted to North America, and that their "personalities" have greatly influenced the United States to this day, through a cultural "lock-in" process. If it is impossible to fix the system gradually, we will need to be able to restart it well, and we will need to build up people who are really the kind of people to choose to restart it well. This readiness is something that works on multiple levels, not just on the level of explicit ideology and policy, but also in how people process sensory input and the tones of voices they use with each other and so on. So it has to be something deeply lived, in advance.

Revolutionaries might hope to deliberately choose themselves to reseed civilization, but even they might fail to



control who really takes charge. The French Revolution had multiple factions, and led to Napoleon. And the Revolution did not completely form the character of France from then on, with some conservative and religious strains remaining in it. The character of a civilization is widely spread, and yet any random component, at the right time, can become disproportionately influential, for a very long time.

Therefore it is important to deepen as many different people, on as many different dimensions. This seems also to be beneficial in the case that revolution or collapse isn't necessary to change the system.

This deepening is, in other words, the development of trust and trustworthiness. So self-trust is an important component, and so people must deepen themselves, and deepen each other. This is a task that each of us performs, whether elite or not.

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What about the idea that human nature is fixed in our genes? Cultural change can only work on the given genetic substrate.

I talked to a man from Indonesia once who said that everyone there was very sociable. It sounded like people didn't get a lot of time alone. At the time, that sounded like something I could not live with. I couldn't imagine not spending time by myself each day. I've read of traditional cultures which have, if anything, less privacy than contemporary Indonesia.

I might be genetically predisposed to solitude. I can see solitariness, as well as an orientation toward land and nature, in one side of my family. I can assume that some of that is taught or learned, but not that none of it is inherited genetically. The combination of solitariness and land-orientation could easily go back to pre-historic days, genetic systems that produce explorers and mappers.

Among the millions of Indonesians and the many generations of numerous different pre-modern societies, there are likely to be some number of people genetically oriented toward being alone. And these people are acculturated to societies which do not let them be alone. I can imagine myself, transported to Indonesia, slowly acclimating. Part of the acclimating would be learning to process reality like an Indonesian, to feel feelings like they do. Part of it would be learning strategies for being alone in a society which didn't make it as easy as in the United States. And part of it would be enduring the company of other people, unable to be an Indonesian (or what I take to be a typical Indonesian) all the way down, but still being in their country. I might have deep longings, true to who I am, which would never be fulfilled. If I endured patiently, I could be said to be acclimated.

At times, I feel like I could never fit in to other societies, or other parts of my own. Maybe this is true, unfortunately.

Maybe I'm set in my ways. But the human race renews itself with children. If I had been raised 10,000 years ago, I would have had a radically different life than I have right now, and my mind would be shaped radically differently by that life.

There will always be psychopaths, unless we genetically engineer that disposition away. It's possible to raise a psychopath well, producing a more or less normal-behaving human being. I can't assume all psychopaths respond to that, but at least some do. The *Brave New World* scenario of potentially-unbounded biological modification of human beings makes me wary, given the possibility that we can lock away the true human in a simplified brain. One could argue that we do this through external technology, or through social structures. I realized at some point that family members live parts of other family members' lives, have spiritual experiences in place of their family members, and so it is with the economy at large. Perhaps I could be more accepting of genetic modification of the human brain for the sake of modifying human nature if our sense of human well-being weren't safety and pleasure as in *Brave New World* but instead were something like becoming fully trusting and trustworthy people. A very good truster can trust certain aspects of reality which are painful, risky, or uncomfortable, to the extent that they can be trusted. In other words, to experience as much as possible of the good requires that we experience some of the bad. But I am still wary, and would rather avoid the question by working with culture as much as possible, seeing how far that goes. The heart grows by consciously choosing.

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What about the possibility of failure? If we die, we die.  
That's easy to say until you're in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then when you're done with the Garden, it

gets a bit easier until you're up on the Cross. Only at the very end of life can you really finally say "if we die, we die".

I read that Walter Benjamin had a connection to the "losers of history". We might fail at any task that we do, for reasons that we can't foresee. The losers of history thought they could succeed, up until they couldn't think that anymore.

There is value in doing a beautiful thing even if we're all going to die anyway. We can aim ourselves at plausibly doing something to help, at least to doing our best to do something to help, and be diligent in aiming, taking it as seriously as if we really were going to save the world, and work out that aim diligently and industriously, and yet do it all as a beautiful gesture, all at the same time. A movie can end well if the heroine is happy, but also if she is proved true.

## 22.

Thinking about the congestion taxation idea. One unintended consequence of giving people who drive less than the average number of miles a year a bonus is that some will use that money to move further away from their jobs, or to drive more in general. They can trade some of their bonus for extra driving, up until they drive the average amount. This raises the average number of miles driven per person, which is the opposite of what is desired. Perhaps this would be offset by other, intended effects. But it's still something to consider.

When you make an adjustment to a system, the more complex the system is, the more likely you are to create an unintended consequence. The human body is a well-tuned, complex system. So if you take a drug, it will have an intended effect, and side effects.

So it is with a philosophy or religion, or an artwork or ideology. The world of ideas, trustings, and vibes is to a large degree systemic.

Some systems can absorb interventions (drugs, policies, etc) with good effect. I take medications that could give me side effects, but currently they don't. My body is able to compensate for the stress they put on my system. Or my body doesn't happen to have a vulnerability that they would otherwise stress. The task of speaking is rarely finished, either because a new truth has just been discovered, or we

have to find a new way to compensate for the side effects of the old truth.

## 23.

Trust is all there is. Trust is the answer. Trust is "receptivity to enhancement", by persons. Personal enhancement, then, is the point of existence. What is relevant to us is what matters. Each of us is the entire universe and craves even more. Everything is about us, a slight or a form of praise, a threat or a benefit to us.

Who can save us from trust?

We look for the answer to a problem. We look high and low. But what if all of those problems we see are phenomenal problems and the Problem-in-itself<sup>27</sup> which actually afflicts us is one which we can never see, can never understand, and has nothing to do with the ones we see? This is comforting to me, as long as the thought is fresh.

Levinas wrote about the same and the other in *Totality and Infinity*. From what I could understand of the book (not having had the background for it), the world of trust is very much like the same -- although I wouldn't commit to saying it's exactly the same unless and until I understand Levinas better. Levinas proposes that the other is the antidote to the same, which gets a person a long way. But "antidote" is a trust-world word. Given that, it's attractive to me to think of the intellectual Other (I think Levinas was mostly talking about the personal Other, people in need), for instance Parmenides' Being which has nothing to do with anything we can understand or naturally care about. But again, we

can care about Being just in that it helps us escape the worst of the trust-world. If we lean hard enough on Being, then we do not escape the worst of the trust-world.

How do you take a break from existence itself? You can try sleeping, but then, do "you" really ever sleep? We infer that we sleep, and people tell us we sleep, but are any of us actually *there* in our sleepings? (Excepting dreams, which do not always come.) Death doesn't seem to be a good option either, for similar reasons.

Other than the partial treatments of Kantian Problems or Parmenidean Being or Levinasian alterity (perhaps in decreasing order of effectiveness for me at the moment), what is the real treatment? I don't know, and I have to leave things at that. Somehow I hope that this solution can have some kind of unity with trust and trustworthiness, without itself being trustworthy or untrustworthy, nor even trusted or untrusted (somehow). As though trust and trustworthiness "play on the same team" as it, although they are distinct things. I can propose, but not prove (at least now, or in words) that God is both the salvation through trust and the salvation from trust. "Blind faith" at least frees us from the clutching of some sight.

But receptivity is different than clutching. Perhaps, then, real trust, real existence, just is saved from the trust-world's worst aspects. Or, what we should seek is trust, not enhancement itself.



**24.**

Part of endurance is finding new ways to do the same old thing.

## 25.

I'm a little bit older than I used to be, and I used to be worse at life and better at enduring it. I can see myself walking toward a pasture.

But I haven't really arrived. I have to find a new fuel source.

We probably have to do something unnatural in order to make things better in the world. The status quo is made out of human nature. It's hard to live an unnatural life, although it's not impossible.

Human being is leaning. Leaning is all we do, and when we don't lean, we crave to lean.

God is salvation for the person seeking to trust as well as the person escaping trust, because we can lean on him, rather than on the (ordinarily-)experienced world. Trust in God is a relief from the ordinary kind of trust.

I have to learn to trust God in a way I didn't before. I always trusted God, but not as I have to now, in order to keep doing what I need to do.

[25](#)podcast by Nima Shirazi and Adam Johnson

[26](#)by David Hackett Fischer

[27](#)Parallel to Kant's "thing-in-itself", so we can call this a "Kantian Problem"



**END MATERIAL**

# **OBJECTIONS ANTICIPATED**

The nature of this book is such that I don't want to alter very much what I have already said, but on reviewing it for the first time, I see that there are aspects to which some readers might find objections. Without removing what I've written before, I want to explore what I think are the parts of the book likely to be found objectionable.

## **Ch. 4, section 14, p. 38**

"I think that we approach rest the wrong way, unless we have been through particularly horrible things."

Is there another way to lose restlessness? Perhaps through a long, long process like wearing braces more than getting surgery. Perhaps some people choose rest from a very young age, so far back that they've forgotten the choice.

## **Ch. 7, section 2, p. 61**

"Does God need Jesus' death to forgive us? Or was he always forgiving us?"

The implication of the passage in ch. 7 is that the answer to the first question is "No." and that the answer to the second is "Yes."

I can imagine some people objecting to this that the Bible makes it clear that Jesus' death was for our sins and that God would not or could not forgive us without Jesus dying to "pay the price".

It seems odd to me that God would need to see his son die, see a perfect sacrifice die, in order to pay off an inexorable debt. God's self-interest is to see us exist or flourish, and his other-interest is to hold us accountable for our sins so that we truly become like him at heart (or perhaps these are both self-and-other-interests). How is it in God's interests, or in ours, to not forgive us? If God is rational and sovereign, why would he let his grudge overcome him?

One possibility is that God has a selflessness or an anti-self-interest, in addition to his self-and-other-interest, and this anti-self-interest is his submission to the Law. Did he create this Law? Or is it a property of him which is outside his control?

We know of a lot of people who have non-ideal personality conflicts. We suppose that through their non-ideal growings-up or their non-ideal genes they are stuck with

some strange conflict. God is supposed to be perfect, but perhaps we are all imperfect for not having this conflict and not needing it assuaged by a substitutionary death.

(Perhaps Jesus' death would satisfy us -- and perhaps part of the value of his death is to help us forgive, somehow through that.)

It is possible that traditional readings of the Bible are faulty and that such ideas as the penal substitutionary theory of the Atonement aren't true. If the Bible is literally-enough true, however, Jesus paid the price for my sins. So either way, I am forgiven of my sins -- either Jesus paid the price that had to be paid, or it doesn't matter because God didn't need Jesus' death to forgive sins. Once my sins are forgiven, it is up to me to turn my heart toward God.



## **Ch. 18, section 1, p. 154**

"Nothing is infinite, unless God is infinite and the world I observe is an illusion."

Couldn't there be an arbitrary number of infinite things which produce this world, which appears to be finite? I don't see a world in which God could be infinite (unless the world is to some extent an illusion). Given evil, in some sense God is limited, and he just is a certain kind of person. But if the world is an illusion, there could be arbitrarily many things which produce the illusion.

Should we think there are such things as infinite things?

When we investigate, we find that things are finite. To describe something fully is to observe its finitude. It is only in not describing fully that infinitude is possible for us to see. Real infinitude is possible, perhaps, but shouldn't be our default assumption, and can never be proved by ordinary observation. Either we need math or something like it to prove it (similar to how math can predict quantum particles before scientists observe them), or we need a kind of observation that can somehow trump the ordinary collecting of evidence, so that what appears to be really infinite can be known as such without accounting for it in all its details.

## **Ch. 18, section 3, p. 160**

"God can do things that fly under the radar of science, God can keep the miracles away from the studies so that scientists can't see them (which might be of a sort of pragmatic value to God, given that materialism can protect people from spiritual darkness; or perhaps there are other reasons why God can't show himself to materialists on that level, some kind of negotiation with the darker spiritual forces)."

One problem with this view is that it seems too convenient for the theist to claim. Many theists believe that God has spoken to them in some special way, and so as far as they are concerned, they have evidence that God speaks to people, performs that large or small miracle. Someone not having experienced that for themselves, or perhaps not having heard a second-hand report from someone who has whom they don't have reason to think is lying, need not, unless and until there is conclusive scientific evidence.

## **Ch. 19 intro, p. 167**

This chapter contains historical references. I am not well-read in history, and I don't know when I will ever have time, appetite, and energy to properly investigate the background to this. Someone could destroy my specific references with better knowledge, although it is probable that some would stand, and perhaps all would.

The aspects that come out of my own experience I am willing to vouch for. And I think the underlying psychological and spiritual realities of nationalism, in its English, Indian, Nazi, and American forms, I am willing to stand by from having seen them in myself, even if it turns out that my specific historical examples prove to be invalid.

## **Ch. 21, section 2, p. 191**

"The GDP per capita of the US is \$40,000 a year or so, and that might be considered a nice middle-class income (I would consider it such), and oddly, I doubt our lives are two times better than \$20,000 a year in a developing country.

We prefer our lives in the US at \$40,000, but we don't necessarily choose rationally."

Part of what makes \$20,000 a year go so far in less-developed countries is that people are paid low wages. In America, to an extent, we get the benefit of having paid our lower-paid people more for the same work. They get to spend more money. In order to decrease economic / ecological footprint, it seems to me (a non-economist) that everyone would have to be paid less and consume less. The most poor could be kept from whatever level of "unacceptable destitution" by redistributing wealth in some form from those who have excessive amounts.

A well-designed society can minimize the extent to which lack of individual wealth matters. Kerala state in India has a relatively low per capita income and a relatively high Human Development Index, perhaps for a reason like that. It's also possible that HDI isn't exactly aimed at true human benefit (or maybe it is), and if not one could design a society that was more livable, more trustworthy in some sense, at a lower HDI.

## WORKS READ

These are things I read (or listened to, or watched), mentioned in the work above:

p. 18 Joseph Godfrey, *Trust of People, Words, and God*.

p. 42 Johann Hari, "Everything you know about addiction is wrong"

p. 48 Simone Weil, *The Need For Roots* (I haven't finished this yet)

p. 50, 112, 184, 185, 192 George Orwell, *1984*

p. 50, 196 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

p. 50, 65, 66 Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Volume V*

p. 55 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

p. 64 Various Authors, *The Bible* (World English Bible)

p. 73, 78 Arnold Kasar and Hans-Joachim Roedelius, *Einfluss*

p. 75 Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

p. 78 My Bloody Valentine, *Loveless*

p. 82 Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*

p. 83 Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*

p. 84 Joseph Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*

p. 93 Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay*

p. 98 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, (1959 Oxford University Press edition)

p. 113 Scott Alexander, "Meditations on Moloch" (from slatestarcodex.com)

p. 132 Dougie MacLean, "All Together"

p. 133 Trygve Gulbrandsen, *Beyond Sing the Woods* (1936 Literary Guild edition)

p. 141 "The World We Built" by Jedidiah Purdy and "Out from Emergency" by Katrina Forrester and Jedediah Purdy (I didn't finish the latter), both published in *Dissent*.

p. 141 Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*

p. 164 Robert Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines*

p. 164 Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamö* (I haven't finished this yet)

p. 192 Nima Shirazi and Adam Johnson, *Citations Needed* (Various episodes)

p. 200 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*

I mentioned but have not read Kevin Kelly's *What Technology Wants* (p. 24), nor David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* (p. 193).

# RECOMMENDATIONS

These are things I don't think I mentioned, which I can recommend from my own experience:

*I and Thou* by Martin Buber.

*Gravity and Grace* by Simone Weil.

*Spirituality and the Desert Experience* by Charles Cummings.

Collections of sayings of the Desert Fathers/Mothers, such as *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, tr. Benedicta Ward.

*The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* by Ramon Llull (which I am slowly finishing).

*DBT Skills Training Manual* by Marsha Linehan.

*Wit* (2001) (Mike Nichols, Emma Thompson, Margaret Edson)

*Testament* (1983) (Lynne Littman, John Sacret Young, Jane Alexander, Carol Amen)



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2. [WORKS READ](#)

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